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OUR 150th ISSUE

BLUES MATTERS!

JUNE 2025 ☆ 150

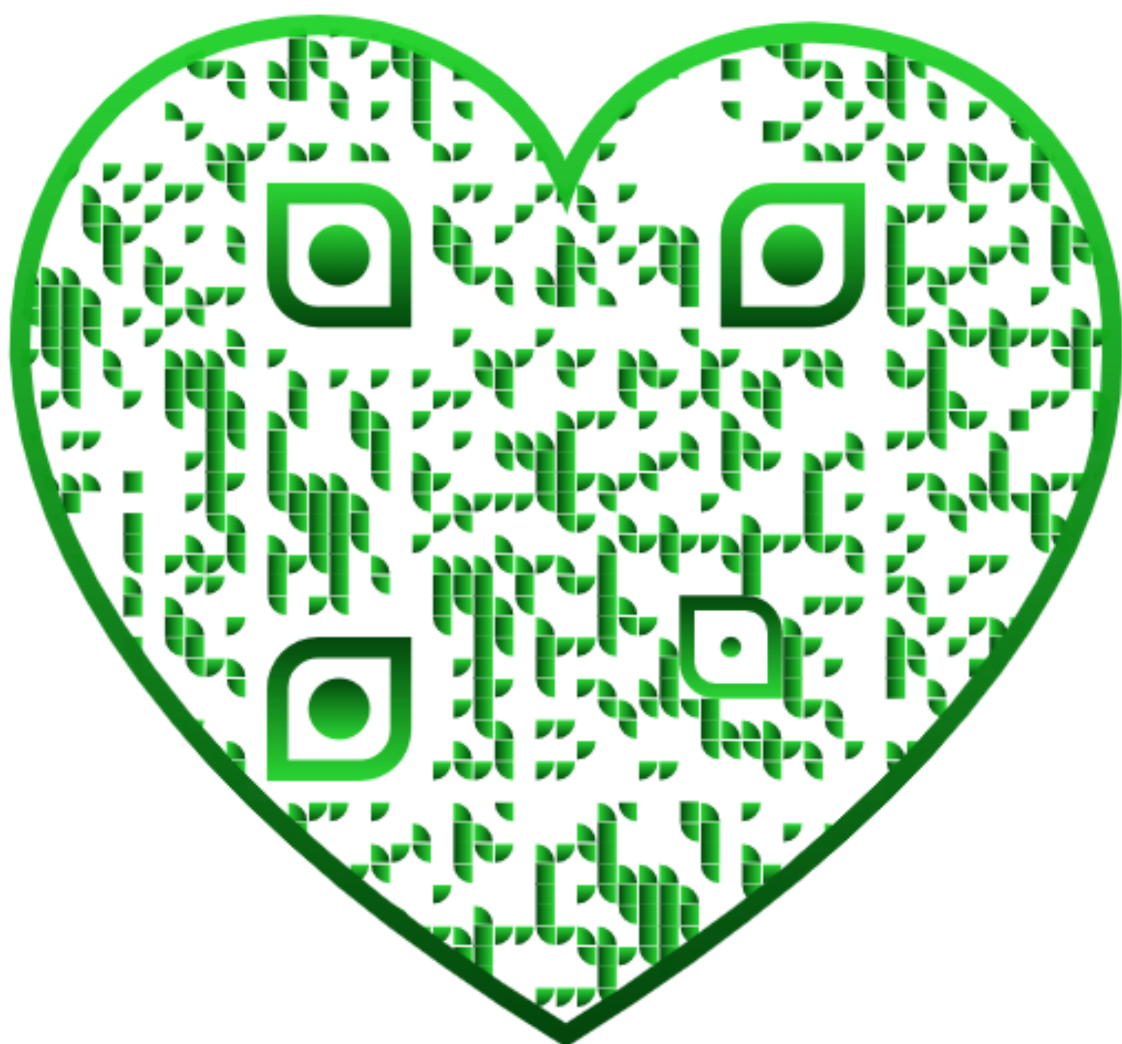
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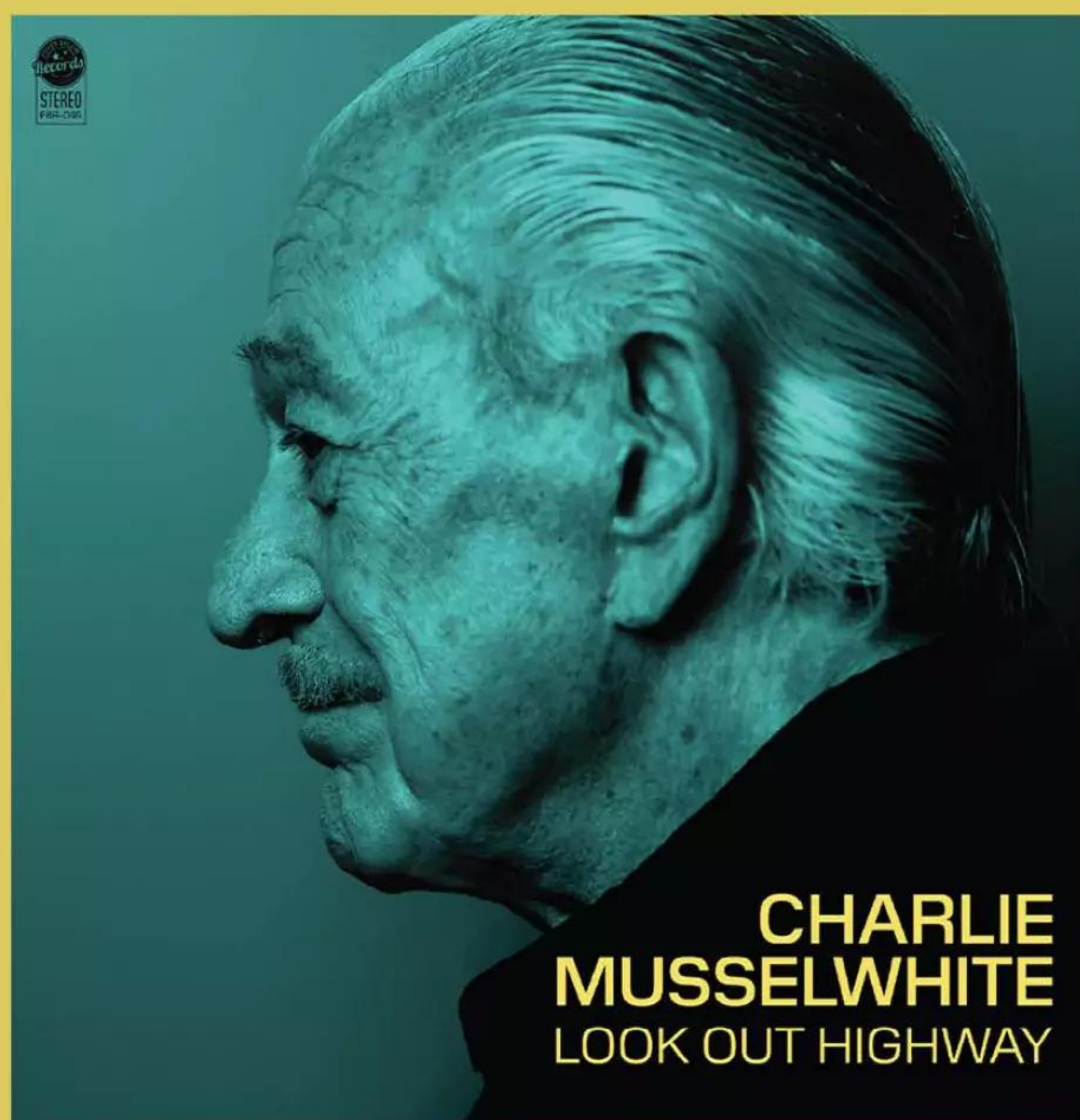
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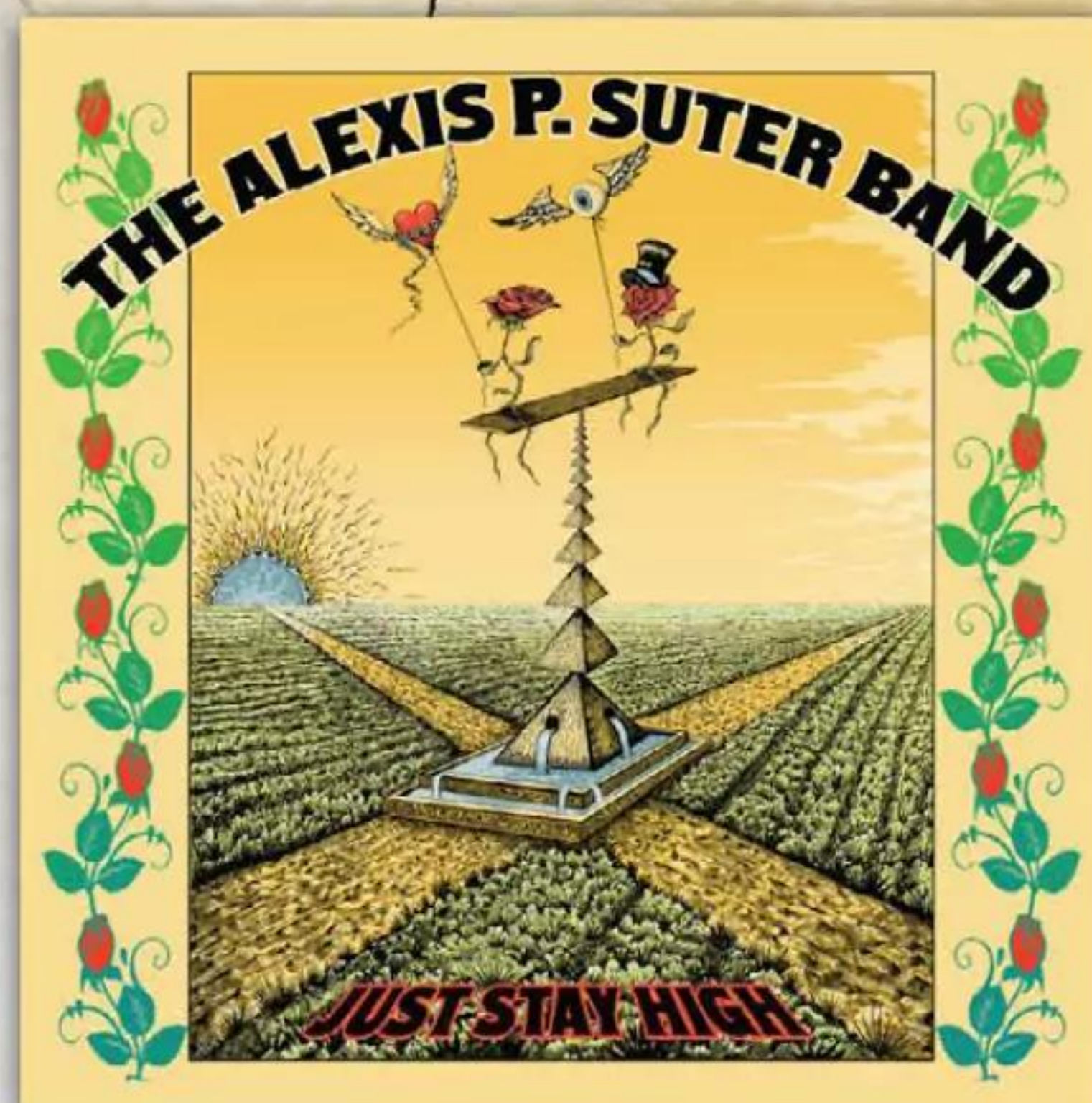
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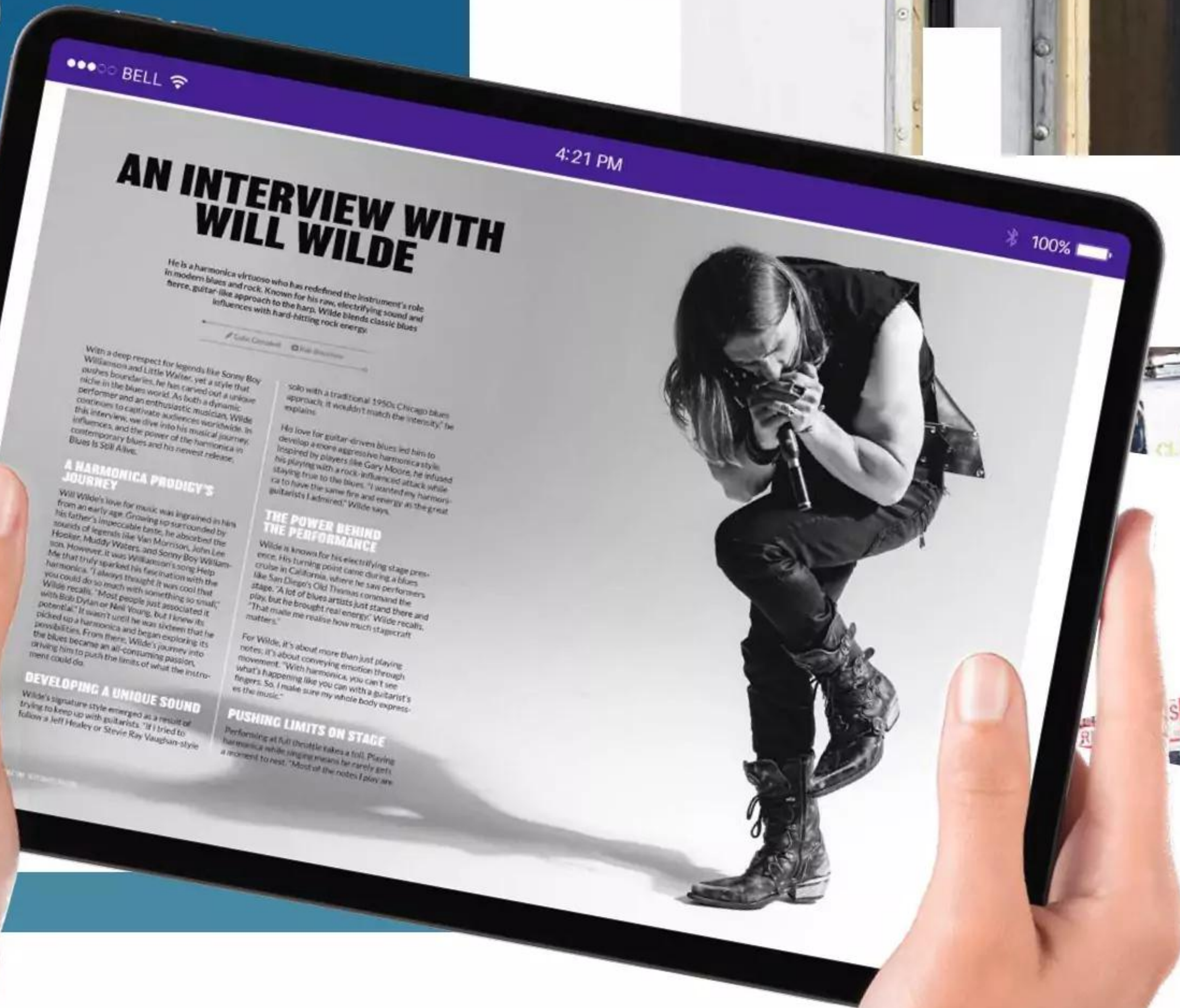
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CAROLYN WONDERLAND



150 ISSUES OLD

THE STORY OF BLUES MATTERS! MAGAZINE

Blues Matters! began not as a business venture but as a deeply personal project born from one man's unwavering love of blues music. That man was Alan Pearce, a lifelong fan, passionate writer, and tireless champion of musicians and writers alike.

Alan's first steps into publishing came in the late 1990s with Shades of Savoy Brown, a fanzine dedicated to his musical hero Kim Simmonds and the legendary British blues-rock outfit Savoy Brown. It was a homemade labour of love, created purely to honour the band that had inspired him for decades. One of his proudest moments came when he helped secure Savoy Brown a place in Record Collector's Top Ten Blues Rock Bands.

In 1998, Alan took the next step, founding Blues Matters! - a title inspired, fittingly, by a Savoy Brown album. The very first issue, printed on blue paper and hand-stapled, was modest in appearance but bold in intent. From those early DIY beginnings, the magazine grew steadily, powered by Alan's dedication and refusal to compromise on his mission: to give the blues the platform it deserved.

Alan was never in it for ego. Those who knew him describe a humble and respectful man, devoted to honouring the music and the people who made it. His encyclopaedic knowledge of the blues was matched by an open, generous spirit. He was as enthusiastic about unsigned artists as he was about legends, and he gave opportunities to emerging writers and photographers, many of whom got their start thanks to his belief in them.

Under Alan's guidance, Blues Matters! gained international recognition and loyal readership around the world. In 2013, the magazine received the prestigious Keeping the Blues Alive Award from The Blues Foundation in Memphis-one of the genre's highest honours. Alan's long-time friend and collaborator Arnie Goodman accepted the award on his behalf.

The magazine celebrated its 100th issue in March 2018, with none other than Kim Simmonds on the cover - a heartfelt nod to the inspiration behind it all. By February 2022, Blues Matters! had reached Issue #125, a remarkable achievement built on Alan's passion, resilience, and sheer determination.

A New Chapter: Growth, Change, and a Digital Future

After Alan's passing in 2022, the future of Blues Matters! is now led by Iain and Stephen, two long-time blues supporters who were committed to honouring Alan's legacy while ensuring the magazine remained relevant in a changing world.

Under their leadership, the magazine underwent a thoughtful evolution. The print edition moved from A5 to full-size A4, with upgraded paper stock and a more modern, professional finish-enhancing the reader experience while preserving the magazine's independent spirit.

Eventually, Blues Matters! made the bold transition to a digital-only format, embracing the possibilities of an interactive platform. Readers can now enjoy rich, multimedia features that go beyond print-embedded audio and video, clickable content, direct links to artists and music, and an immersive layout designed for devices of all kinds.

While the format has changed, the heart of the magazine remains the same. Blues Matters! continues to shine a light on the global blues scene, championing both heritage artists and fresh voices, and connecting fans with the stories, struggles, and soul of the music.

Alan Pearce may no longer be with us, but his spirit echoes through every feature, review, and story. The exclamation mark in the title mattered to him-it was never just Blues Matters, it was Blues Matters!

Today, it still does.

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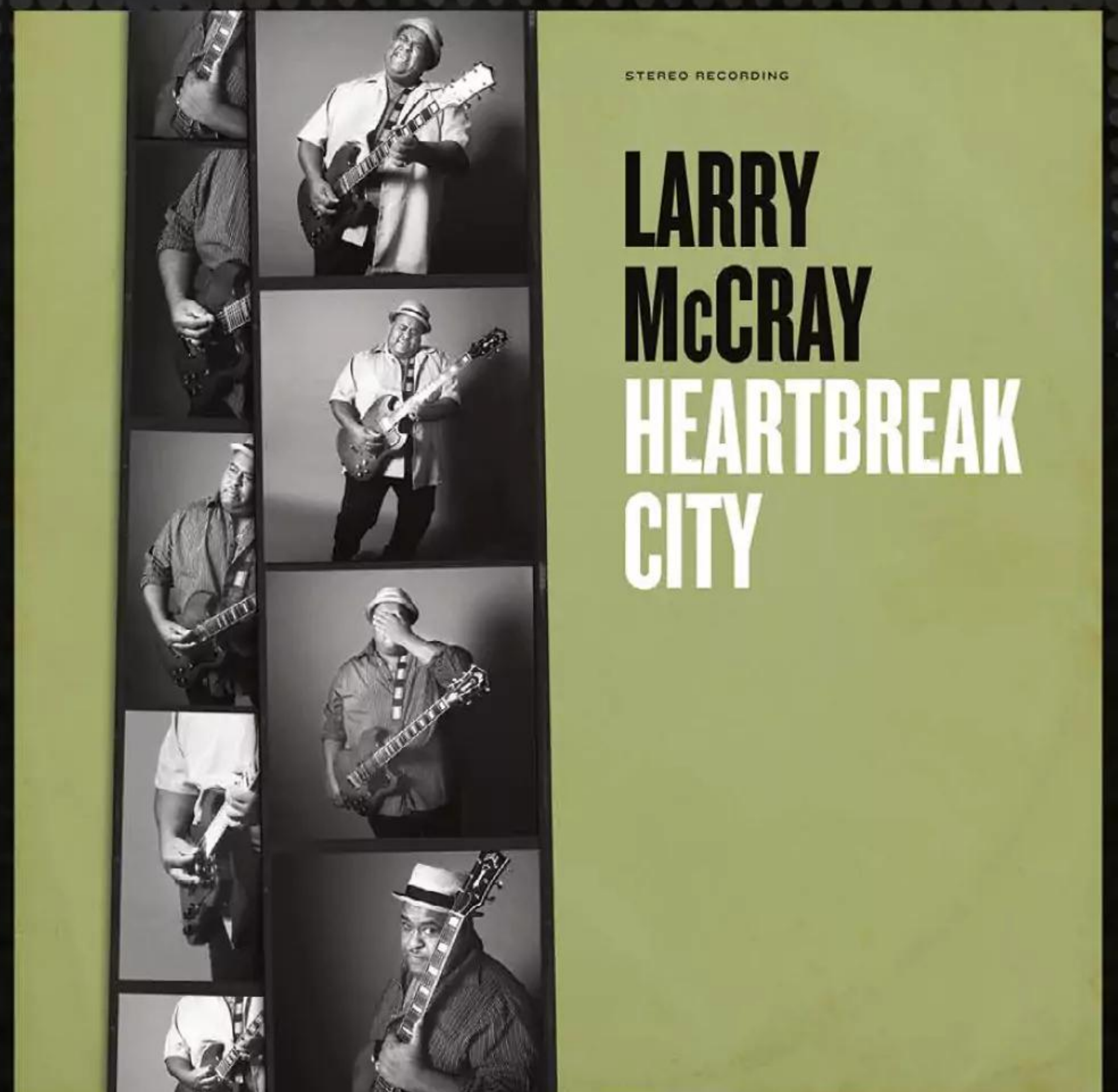
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***“LARRY MCCRAY’S
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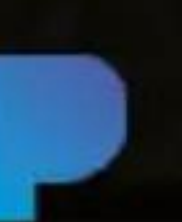
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ENDING UP ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

LARRY McCRAY

I was lucky enough to see Larry McCray live about ten years ago, during a UK tour. He was stunning - one of the best blues guitarists I've ever witnessed. His blistering solos wrapped effortlessly around incredibly soulful vocals. The band were on fire, and included his brother Steve on drums. Larry played with the power of Jimmy Dawkins and the soul of B.B. King, with a voice on par with any Motown or Stax legend.

✍ Steve Yourglivch 📷 Curtis Knapp

But around that time, life took a difficult turn. Larry was diagnosed with cancer, and shortly after, his marriage fell apart. His ex-wife was later convicted of fraud and sentenced to 18 months in jail. Larry focused on raising their teenage son while navigating a turbulent period. And then, of course, the pandemic hit.

Now, things are looking up. Larry's new partner, Peggy, is supportive and involved in songwriting. His son, Bleau Otis, is starting a music career of his own. And Larry's second album for Joe Bonamassa's Keeping the Blues Alive label is about to drop. Titled Heartbreak City, it's out on 13 June and features contributions from Joe Bonamassa, co-producer Josh Smith, Kirk Fletcher, and Reese Wynans. A tour with Devon Allman's Blues Summit is also on the horizon.

With so much having changed since we last spoke, I was excited to catch up with Larry via Zoom.

"I'M AN OLD DOG WARRIOR"

I began by asking how he was feeling about the album and the upcoming tour.

"Not bad. I mean, I've seen better days, but I'm an old dog warrior," Larry says with a wry smile. "I've got a serious back issue going on now. I've ridden 40-something years on the road. My back is in bad shape, man. I saw a neurosurgeon - they're going to fuse a few of my lower lumbar. I've got a lot coming up and I can't stop now, so I'm trying

to rehabilitate, working hard at physical therapy."

I told Larry how much I was enjoying the new tracks and mentioned that Heartbreak City might finally introduce him to a wider audience. Previous recordings, great as they were, never quite captured the full force of his talent.

"I'm giving it my best," he said. "People have been good to me for a long time. I'm old enough to be watching my grandkids play ball by now, but you just never know what people are going to respond to. Sometimes you have dark shadows in your career. You think maybe you're not good enough. But it's up to the people to decide your fate in this industry."

"I'm not playing any different than I always have - but now it seems like it might actually make a difference. I think the reason is that so many other things have had their moment, and maybe now it's time for this kind of music to get the spotlight again. And I'm one of the vehicles for that."

SETBACKS, MANAGEMENT WOES AND MOVING FORWARD

When Larry was diagnosed with prostate cancer, he was already facing difficulties with his management team, which made things worse.

"I was trying to make peace with life. I was never allowed

to play in the big leagues. I had a lot of potential, but I was in such a messed-up situation with management and everything else, I never made it. It's always been about trying to get back to that same position again."

Now, with Heartbreak City being his second release on KTBA (following 2022's Blues Without You), and with Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith handling production and promotion, it felt like the perfect time to ask if this moment represented a turning point.

"Making music is one thing, but when you've got proper production, you don't have to worry about things being clean. That's the whole point. You just play the music and let the professionals do what they do."

"In the past, we were doing the best we could with what we had. We got the best of what we could do - not necessarily the best it could be. I just hope there's still a listener out there for this type of music. Young people today are so disconnected - across all ethnicities. There's no real grounding."

"But there are always going to be good kids who connect. I appreciate all kinds of music - heavy, country, street, blues, classic rock, mellow. I think there are only two kinds of music: good and bad. Genre doesn't matter. If a person's got skills, I've got respect and I want to give them a chance to be heard."

SELF-TAUGHT, SOUL-DRIVEN

"When it comes to music, you've got to look at it from a different angle. Sure, we all have limitations. Not all of us are virtuosos. But if you stick with it, learn and persevere - that's the blessing."

"There's value in being self-taught. Your music comes from inside. People ask me, 'How do you play like that?' I don't ever know what I'm going to play until it's time to play. It's intuitive. You can try to plan it out in rehearsals, but that's just to find your comfort zone. Once you're in it, every performance should be slightly different. You're not going to play the exact same nuance every time."

"I'M A BLUESMAN FIRST"

Larry has always blended blues and soul, but he's clear about where he stands.

"When I make my music, I'm a bluesman first, foremost, and always. But I bring other elements in - without going so far that it's no longer blues."

"The soulful part is on purpose. A lot of my heroes were soulful - Johnny Adams, Solomon Burke. If you try to take it to the next level, you've got to study what people do well, and what they don't. I always loved the soul in blues, but I thought it could use a bit of octane - more force and conviction. Like a rock player, but still with purpose and intent."

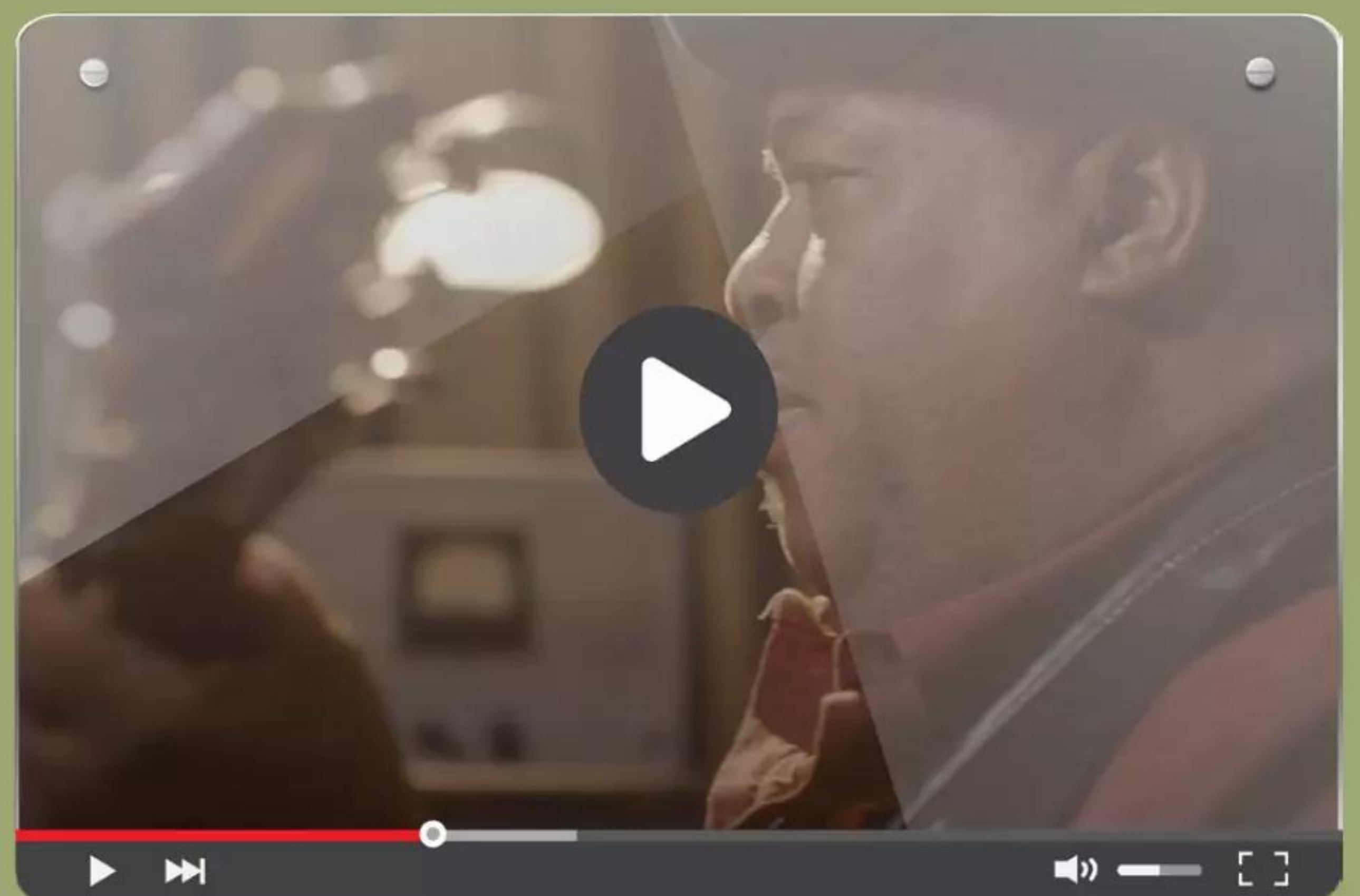
"My sister Claire taught me guitar. She gave me all these musicians to listen to - Mississippi Fred, Otis Spann, Muddy Waters, Booker T., Earl Hooker. I'm a huge Earl Hooker fan. I'd listen to all of them and try to mimic their sound, not just the notes, but the texture, the dynamics, the nuance. That's what makes the difference."

Larry's journey started young.

"I wore my mum out until I was about nine and left the house. My brother's guitar was a True Tone. Later, my brother-in-law worked for GM. A guy there had a Gibson. He got it for me - and I never put it down."

He laughs, remembering early musical memories.

"I was in Arkansas until 1971. I listened to AM radio - Candi Staton, Wilson Pickett, Joe Tex. We were just kids, running around, but it lit me up."



WORKING WITH CANDI STATON

"You mentioned Candi Staton - have you heard her amazing new album?" I asked.

"I'm on it! I'm on the track God Is at the End of Your Room. I met her son years ago - we were in a band together. He knew I was a huge fan, so he got me involved. If I could sing the way I wanted, I'd sound like her."

"I got to tell her that. I met her last year or the year before. That was a real peak in my career. She was just as sweet as candy. So easy, so welcoming. I was starstruck. That doesn't happen to me often, but she got me."

Heartbreak City and Studio Stories

Talking about the new album, it's clear there was a lot of joy in the process.

"Working with Joe and Josh is a joy. The first time, I was nervous. Their pedigree, you know? I was intimidated. But this time, I felt like I belonged. I just went in and did what I could do. I've known Josh since he was a kid. I met Joe when he was much younger than me and just starting out. I always tried to treat people right - and they remember."

His partner Peggy co-wrote several songs on the record.

“Everything Falls On Me - that’s mostly her. I wrote the hook. The rest was all her lyrics. It was the most fun track to play on. I was noodling around and she said, ‘That sounds like everything falls on me.’ I was like, ‘What?’ She’d been working on lyrics, went and grabbed them, and we built the song from there. Josh helped shape the arrangement.”

Then there’s Keep On Loving My Baby, a loose, joyful track.

“That’s the one with Kirk. I didn’t even know what I was saying at first - I was riffing on the fly. They said, ‘Just give us a scratch vocal’ and started recording. But it felt good, so we kept it. It’s so spontaneous, and that’s the soul of it.”

He adds with a grin, “Heartbreak City - that’s got an Eagles-style intro. That lift, that feeling - it takes you somewhere.”

REFLECTIONS AND A PHOTO WITH ALBERT KING

Our chat drifted to musical influences. When I mentioned Albert King, Larry lit up and disappeared from the screen. He returned holding a treasured photo.

“This was taken in 1987, I think. A guy came up and snapped it. I didn’t think anything of it - but a few years later, Albert had passed. I realised I had no photo with him. I asked the promoter Jay Sheffield if he remembered. A few days later, he texted me this photo. It meant the world.”

“Albert was on my first tour. So was Albert Collins. I’d known them both from the States. They’d see me play in clubs. But Albert King was bitter. He didn’t feel like he was getting paid fairly. He once said, ‘Next time someone wants me, it’s going to cost a whole lot of money.’ And not long after that, he passed.”

Larry McCray’s Heartbreak City is released 13 June on KTBA Records. For more info and tour dates, visit www.larrymccray.net.

EXPLORE



A photograph of a man in a dark suit and white shirt performing on stage. He is holding a microphone in his right hand and has his left hand on a surface in front of him. The background is dimly lit with blue and purple stage lights.

ORKNEY BLUES FESTIVAL

Various Venues Stromness | 25-27 April 2025

Once again, the Orkney Blues Festival transformed the tranquil town of Stromness into a vibrant celebration of blues music. In a change from tradition, the 2025 edition moved from its usual September slot to a new spring date - and the result was a resounding success.

✍ Colin Campbell 📷 Thibault Grs

A rich blend of returning favourites and new talent captivated audiences in a range of intimate venues. With each passing year, the festival continues to grow in stature, much like a fine Orkney whisky. The relaxed atmosphere, warm local welcome, and high-quality performances attract both locals and visitors from far and wide. Although the journey can be long, the lure of the festival is undeniable. The artist line-up this year included both returning acts and newcomers, and feedback from performers has been overwhelmingly positive. Festival organiser Dylan Pepper and his hardworking team deserve huge credit for going the extra mile. Hosting a festival in the islands is no small feat, but the sound, lighting, venues, accommodation, and food offerings all ran smoothly. This year even

featured a bonus pre-festival concert the night before the official programme began.

THURSDAY 24 APRIL - THE WARM-UP

An intimate preview gig at the Royal Hotel, the hub of the festival, kicked things off. Ian Siegal delivered a one-man, one-guitar show to a rapt audience. His set was superb, with a haunting rendition of Psycho, a reflective Stone By Stone, and a medley of One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer, all performed with dextrous fingerpicking and compelling storytelling.



Sharing the bill were local duo Saltfishforty, comprising Brian Cromarty on vocals and guitar and Douglas Montgomery on fiddle and viola. Blending traditional Orcadian tunes with original compositions, they added bluesy undertones to their folk-infused set. Their humour and chemistry were obvious, and the audience loved it. Breadbin Blues was a particular highlight. Ian Siegal later joined them onstage for a version of Milk Cow's Calf Blues, which was simply magical.



FRIDAY 25 APRIL - A FULL LAUNCH

Across the weekend, Stromness venues such as the Town Hall, Ferry Inn, Royal Hotel and Stromness Legion Club hosted a packed programme. Artists also performed further afield, with gigs at the Gable End Theatre on Hoy and Burray Village Hall. Kyla Brox played at The Girnel in Kirkwall. All shows were well attended.



Opening Friday night at Stromness Town Hall were Helen May and Chris Preston, performing acoustic as Blues Alley: The Songs of Eva Cassidy. Also performing as The Violet Hours later in the weekend, they paid heartfelt tribute to Cassidy's work. Songs like Take Me to the River and Chain of Fools resonated beautifully in the Hall's acoustics. End of the Rainbow stood out in particular, moving some audience members to tears.





Next up was Paolo Fuschi with another superb acoustic set. Starting with Little Devils in My Head, he mixed BB King-inspired guitar work with soulful vocals. Walk Away proved especially catchy and had a few return appearances during the weekend. His closing number, If My Baby Was a Song, was warmly received.

Franny Eubank then joined Paolo for a vibrant set full of old-school blues. Franny's harmonica skills and showmanship made him an instant crowd favourite. His take on It Hurts Me Too and Summertime were delivered with emotional depth. Further On Up the Road and Nobody Loves You showed his command of the stage and his tight connection with Paolo.

Later, a quick stop to see local band Bad Apple revealed a fun, high-energy performance of Superstition, with Leah Seator's vocals standing out over the tight, funky backing.

Back at the Town Hall, Connolly Hayes made their Orkney debut. A stunning set mixed blues, Americana, funk, and soul. Jess Hayes delivered powerhouse vocals while Frankie Connolly impressed on guitar. The band played tracks from their acclaimed debut Remember Me, previously selected as





the Independent Blues Broadcasters Association's Pick of the Month. Beau Barnard (bass), Andy Wilder (drums), and Joe Mac (keys) completed the group. Highlights included Tired of This Love and a funk-laced version of Across 110th Street.

Closing the night was The Franny Eubank Band, featuring Fuschi, Blo-meley and Laurie Agnew. In the more intimate Blues Club setting, they delivered a gritty, energetic set full of crowd-pleasers. The Sky is Crying captured the mood perfectly, while Kansas City, Johnny B. Goode, and Rock Me Baby got the audience on their feet. A classic finish to a great day.

SATURDAY 26 APRIL - WORKSHOPS AND WALL- TO-WALL BLUES

Saturday started with two popular workshops at the Royal Hotel. Franny Eubank led a hands-on harmonica session with great energy, while Paolo Fuschi's guitar workshop drew a

curious crowd eager to pick up some pro tips.

Meanwhile, the Stromness Legion hosted the Burray Blues Club, a collective of local players belting out blues covers like Let's Stick Together and Smokestack Lightning. The packed room was hot, loud and full of good vibes. Musicians of all ages took part, and the sound was excellent, especially the saxophone and youthful drummer.

At the Town Hall, young guitarist Tom Rhodes opened with a



well-received set of instrumental guitar work. It was his first solo slot there, but his confident, melodic playing won over the crowd.

Next came Paolo Fuschi and The Outsiders. Fuschi's years of experience were clear, and the band's chemistry shone through. Highlights included This Old World and One True Love. Tom Rhodes joined for Little Devils in My Head and Walk Away, showcasing a natural connection with Fuschi.

Franny Eubank and his band returned with another standout set, including The Thrill Has Gone, Dust My Broom, and a storming jam on Killing Floor. Summertime brought the set to an emotional high point.

The Kyla Brox Band followed, with Kyla's vocals on Beautiful Day and Pain and Glory lifting the entire room. Danny Blomeley's basslines and Paolo's guitar work added polish, while 365 had the audience singing along. They closed with Hallelujah, and the emotional weight of the performance moved many to tears.

After a short break, Connolly Hayes returned with a funkier late-night set. Songs like That's What Love Will Make You Do and Secret showed their versatility. Woman's Gotta Have It and Love the One You're With had the whole room moving. This band oozes talent and confidence.

Gerry McAvoy and Orcadian guitarist Andy Taylor headlined with a thunderous set of Rory Gallagher tunes, joined by Laurie Agnew on drums. McAvoy led the charge with passion, while Taylor, who grew up listening to these songs, clearly relished every moment. Messing with the Kid, Tattoo'd Lady, and Shadow Play hit hard. They closed with Bullfrog Blues, ending Saturday on a high.

SUNDAY 27 APRIL - REFLECTIONS AND FINAL MOMENTS

Sunday began with a well-attended Q&A upstairs in the Royal Hotel. Gerry McAvoy shared stories from his time on the road with Rory Gallagher and answered audience questions with charm and insight.

Later, Mockingbird, Orkney's local supergroup, lit up the Stromness Legion. Jake Milway and Leah Seator led the charge with vocals and guitar, joined by Andy Taylor, Douglas Mont-

gomery, Colin Drever and Ross Gill. Songs like Roadhouse Blues, Black Night and Stay with Me rocked the packed venue.

After a brief jazz set at the Ferry Inn led by Dave Flanagan on double bass, the final evening at the Town Hall began.

The Violet Hours provided a gentle opening, with Helen May and Chris Preston in perfect harmony. Ian Siegal followed with his full band (Fuschi, Blomeley and Agnew), playing Working on a Building, She Got the Devil, Hard Pressed, and Falling Down. Franny Eubank guested once more. A standout moment was their take on Elvis Costello's I Can't Stand Up.

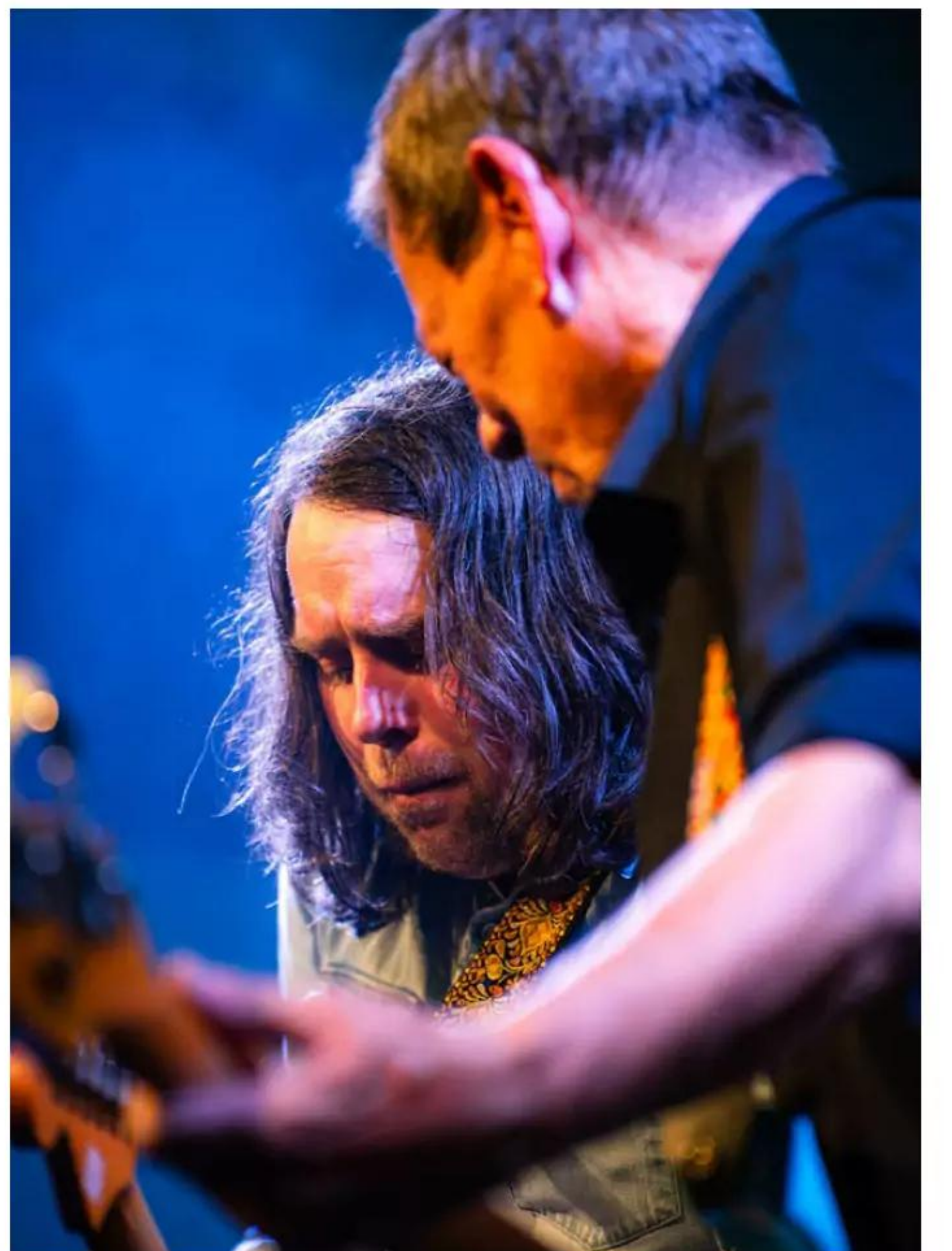
Gerry McAvoy and Andy Taylor returned with Laurie Agnew to deliver another dose of Rory Gallagher. Opening with Philby, they tore through Sense of Freedom, Tattoo'd Lady, Shadow Play, and finally Bullfrog Blues. Their energy never dipped.

Closing the festival was Kyla Brox with a set celebrating the women of the blues. With covers of Koko Taylor, Etta James, Big Mama Thornton and Nina Simone, Kyla delivered a stunning finale. A duet with Ian Siegal on I'd Rather Go Blind was unforgettable, and Feeling Good brought the house to its feet one last time.

The Orkney Blues Festival continues to prove it can host world-class acts in a unique and welcoming setting. The music, the atmosphere, the friendships - everything about it makes the journey worthwhile.

For more information, visit:
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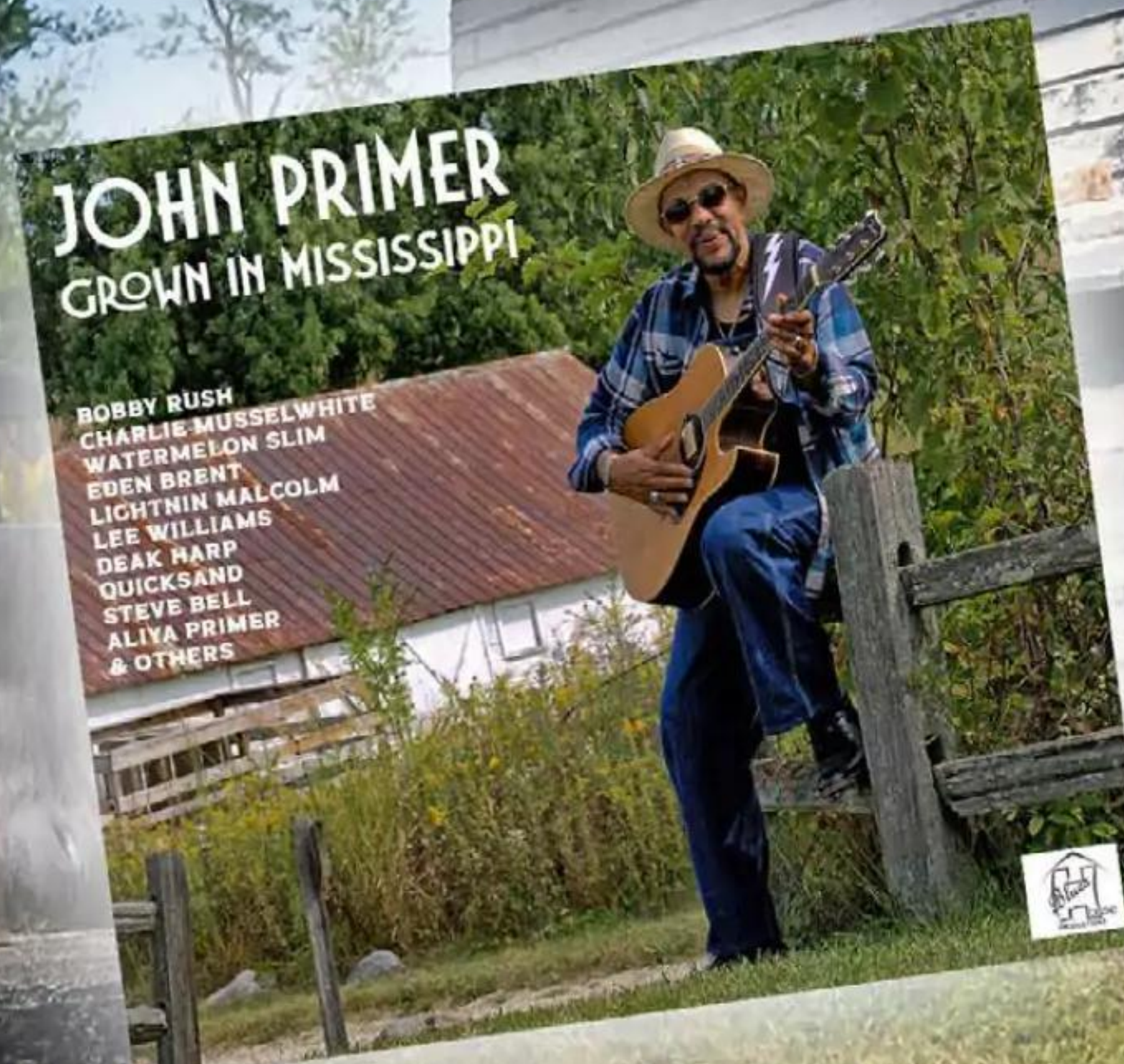
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ALEX SUTTER & VICKI BELL

JUST STAY
HIGH...



When it comes to soul-shaking vocals and gospel-soaked blues, few acts deliver with the intensity of the Alexis P. Suter Band. Fronted by the formidable Alexis herself and guided behind the scenes by producer and bandmate Vicki Bell, the group has carved out a unique place in today's blues landscape. Their music radiates raw power and spiritual depth, delivered with honesty and joy.

✍ Colin Campbell

📷 Anne Lewer Geyer

Blues Matters caught up with Alexis and Vicki to talk about their creative chemistry, the roots of their sound, and the deeply personal new album *Just Stay High*. What followed was a candid, moving conversation between two women whose bond is as electric as the music they make.

FROM THE WOMB TO THE STAGE: A MUSICAL INHERITANCE

For Alexis P. Suter, music isn't something she picked up along the way—it's part of who she is.

"I believe it started from the womb," she says with a warm smile. "My mother was a teacher and a singer. She travelled the world, and even when she was pregnant with me, she sang. As soon as I was born, I was already introduced to it. I would see her perform and watch her move people with her voice. I said to myself, 'I want to do that.'"

Her early life was filled with instruments and rhythm. "Snare drum, bass drum, timpani, E-flat tuba, B-flat sousaphone and a little piano. Not great, but enough to get the sound across," she laughs. "Music is the one thing I think I do pretty well, so I try to bring people together in that. Love is universal."

EARLY LESSONS AND FIRST STAGES

Formal training was short-lived. "I think I took vocal lessons for a week," Alexis laughs. "My parents enrolled me in the Children's Theatre in Brooklyn, but my dad pulled me out. He didn't like how we were treated."

Instead, it was her mother who became her guide. "She taught me songs, pronunciation, how to relate to a song. I'd sing at church—my first real audience."

Her earliest public performances came in elementary school. "We got to stand on the big stage after the Pledge of Allegiance," she jokes. "But it was church where I really got going. I was maybe four or five, and my mother just pushed me out there."

To this day, nerves remain part of the ritual. "I still get nervous before every single show, but it's not fear—it's care. I want everything to be right for the people who come to see us."

READING THE ROOM, REACHING THE HEART

"Some audiences, you could do a backflip, and they wouldn't move a muscle—but then after the show, they're rushing up saying how great it was. You just never know," Alexis says. "When someone tells me we moved them, that they lived in our story for 90 minutes—that's what it's all about."

Favourite venues? The Falcon in Marlboro, New York, stands out. "It's my number one," she says. And there were the legendary Midnight Rambles with Levon Helm. "Those were the best—2005 to 2010 especially. When Levon passed, everything changed."

Recent tours have taken them to France. "Some crowds were laid-back, and maybe that was the language. But others? We'd get three or four standing ovations before the set even finished."

A VOICE LIKE NO OTHER

Suter's voice is unforgettable—deep, resonant, and commanding. "I'm definitely a contralto. That's bass-baritone

for a female voice,” she explains. “When I was very young, I was a soprano. Then I was a tenor. Then baritone—that’s where I felt most comfortable.”

Her inspirations include Barry White (“I was president of the Brooklyn chapter of his fan club!”), Ruth Brown, Isaac Hayes, and even Rodgers and Hammerstein. “There weren’t many women singing that low, so I had to mimic the voices I could actually do.”

A key figure in shaping that voice into a full sound is Vicki Bell. “She’s produced 99.9% of our music. People just see her singing and dancing on the side, but she’s behind everything.” Levon Helm once praised Bell’s “sweet, sweet ears,” and her quiet direction continues to bring out the best in the band.

CRAFTING JUST STAY HIGH

The new album took shape over three years, beginning during the isolation of the pandemic. “We started writing during lockdown with Byron Isaacs, our co-producer,” says Bell. Isaacs, known for his work with The Lumineers, helped shape the album through long-distance sessions.

Recording later moved to The Building, a converted church near The Falcon. “The energy there is just right,” says Bell. “It’s a magnificent space.”

But the album also carries profound personal emotion. “I lost my mother before we finished it. She was 101,” says Alexis. “She passed a week after my birthday. I was hoping she could hold on.”

“This CD has a lot of blood, sweat, and tears in it,” she adds. “It’s the best project we’ve ever done.”

STANDOUT SONGS

God Gave Me the Blues, written by Jimmy Bennett, was made for Alexis. “He said, ‘Big Mama, I hear your voice on

this.’” She added a powerful lyric—“What in the hell was he thinking about?”—to give it an edge. “The music called for it.”

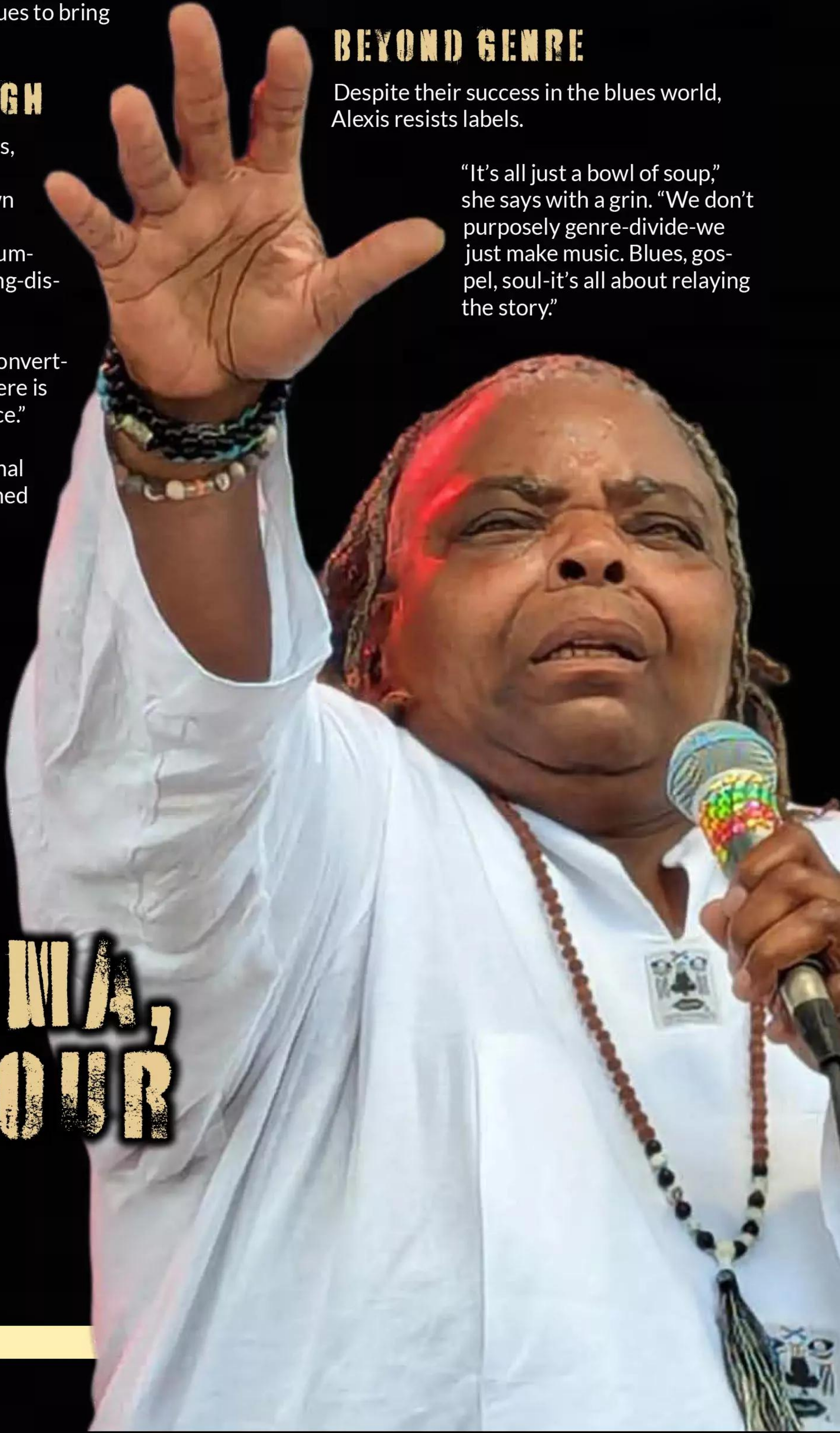
Some People, co-written by Suter and Bell, emerged from their shared experience of the pandemic. “We’ve been singing together so long, we finish each other’s sentences,” Bell says.

Isolation captures the loneliness of lockdown with smoky, jazzy textures, while covers like A Song for You and Piece of Clay pay tribute to musical legends and personal memories. “A Song for You became an anthem while my mum was ill,” says Alexis.

BEYOND GENRE

Despite their success in the blues world, Alexis resists labels.

“It’s all just a bowl of soup,” she says with a grin. “We don’t purposely genre-divide—we just make music. Blues, gospel, soul—it’s all about relaying the story.”



“BIG MAMA,
I HEAR YOUR
VOICE”

"To me, blues and gospel are sisters," she continues. "Blues isn't just sadness. It's real-it's life."

BOWIE, B-52S, AND THE ROAD

One unexpected chapter in their story began with a David Bowie tribute show near Woodstock. Alexis performed "Moondog Daydream," which led to a new record deal and the band's recording of *It Ain't Easy*. Bell even met Kate Pierson of the B-52s during the event. "There were a lot of heavy cats in that lineup. It was an honour."

Then there's *Four Wheels Beat Two Heels*, a song born from life on the road. "That's just our life. How are we gonna get to the gig? I don't know, just get in the car!" Alexis laughs. "It started in the '70s. Bags all around me, and I'd just say: 'Four wheels beat two heels!'"

JUST STAY HIGH: THE TITLE TRACK

Perhaps the most emotionally charged track is the title song, *Just Stay High*.

"It's about someone dear to all of us," Alexis explains. "People think it's about weed or partying, but it's not. It's about depression. Mental illness. It's about how people suffer and don't know how to rise up."

"Alexis tells that story like nobody else," says Bell. "When things lag, she'll look at the band and say, 'Put the church in it!' That's the real vibe."

DEFINING SUCCESS

What does success look like in 2025? "For me, it's about staying alive and doing what you love without apology," says Alexis. Her greatest achievement? Her children. "They embody the values I cherish."

Ultimately, Alexis P. Suter and Vicki Bell don't make music for categories—they make it for people. For healing. For truth. And whatever form it takes, it always comes from the same place.

"Music is life," Alexis says. "You just have to keep going. And when you do, just stay high."

For more information: alexispsuter.com



Alexis P. Suter Band

Photo by Billy Panzica



Alexis P. Suter with BB King

Photo by Laura Carbone



JOHN PRIMER

GROWN IN
MISSISSIPPI

Few modern bluesmen embody the legacy of Chicago blues like John Primer. A commanding guitarist, soulful vocalist, and seasoned bandleader, Primer cut his teeth alongside legends such as Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon, and Magic Slim.

Colin Campbell Erik Kriesant

With a career spanning over five decades, his deep roots in traditional blues and masterful slide guitar work have made him a torchbearer for the genre. His new album, *Grown In Mississippi*, sees him return to his Southern roots—both musically and spiritually. Speaking with *Blues Matters*, John reflects on a life dedicated to the blues, his latest release, and a legacy that keeps on growing. He's also nominated for three Living Blues Awards this year.

THE BLUES CHOSE ME

For John Primer, the guitar was never just an instrument—it was a calling. Born in Camden, Mississippi, his life has always been steeped in the soil of the South and the soul of the blues.

"I just wanted to play guitar all my life. I didn't know nothing about making a career out of it. I just wanted to play."

Raised in a close-knit community where music was more lived than taught, Primer's earliest inspirations came from neighbours and relatives picking strings on front porches. "It was something I always wanted to do," he recalls, speaking of Saturday night gatherings that served as his first stage and classroom.

FROM COTTON FIELDS TO CHICAGO

Though the Delta shaped his sound, Chicago sharpened his skills. As a teenager, Primer left Mississippi behind. "It was hard to leave; I didn't want to leave my grandparents," he says. But the move north opened a new chapter.

At 18, he scraped together seven dollars to buy his first acoustic guitar from a pawn shop. "That guitar started everything."

GROWN IN MISSISSIPPI: A TRIBUTE IN SONG

His latest album, *Grown In Mississippi*, brings everything full circle. Recorded at the Gary Vincent Soundstage in Clarksdale—the cradle of the blues—the record is a heart-

felt tribute to his roots.

"I wanted to do a CD with all the Mississippi guys, down there in Clarksdale. It's a tribute to where I come from. People think I'm from Chicago, but I came from Mississippi to Chicago."

Though the process wasn't rushed, Primer kept it real. "We didn't do it in one take—we worked the songs. But sometimes, that first take, that's the magic."

Each track paints a vivid picture. "Ain't Kicking Up No Dust" captures the memory of walking barefoot down Mississippi backroads. "Walkin' Blues" recalls five-mile treks to school. "We had no bike, no car—just our feet."

The title track, "Grown In Mississippi," co-written with his wife Lisa, is a direct nod to his beginnings. "I said, let's write that song—I was born and grew up in Mississippi."

Even his take on "Down in the Bottom," originally by Howlin' Wolf, hits home. "We used to call the lowlands 'the bottom.' Cotton grew bigger there. That's what he meant."

Other standouts include: *Ain't Nothing But a Chicken Wing*: "I'd always say that. Then I thought—why not write it down? Add some hot sauce if you want to feel it," he laughs.

A Better Day and Lay My Burden Down: gospel-tinged tracks that showcase his range, the latter featuring his daughter, Leah. "She's still in school, but when she's ready, I want her to sing more with me."

Let Me Be Your Electrician: a cheeky Louisiana Red cover, full of bluesy double-entendre. "Just fun, funny and true—like blues should be."

Shame, Shame, Shame: a tribute to Jimmy Reed, recorded with Charlie Musselwhite. "Charlie's everywhere in Clarksdale," he chuckles.

Even childhood favourites make an appearance. "The Crawdad Song" reminds him of playing a diddley bow on

the side of his grandmother's house.

The album opens with John's Blues Holler, a nod to field-work rhythms and family traditions. "My uncles used to sing blues in the cotton fields. We only had one tractor. Everything else was mule and hand."

CAMDEN SATURDAYS AND A BLUES LEGACY

Primer lost his father at age three and was raised by his grandparents and uncle. Though times were tough, Saturdays were full of music and joy.

"When we got old enough, we'd go with them down to the cabins. All the kids playing, people singing and dancing-it was fun."



His grandfather made yearly trips to Jackson to see Muddy Waters live. "They'd come back glowing, feeling good from the blues."

KEEPING THE FLAME ALIVE

Now a respected elder statesman of the blues, Primer remains driven. "I'm trying to keep my legacy going," he says.

With Grown In Mississippi, he's not just looking back-he's bringing the past to life.

A SONGWRITER'S MIND

Primer's writing process is instinctive. "Sometimes it comes from something somebody says-a word or a phrase. Then I just make a song out of it."

He credits Willie Dixon for teaching him structure. "That's how I learned-write the lyrics down and make them rhyme. Once I got it, I got it."

LIFE ON THE ROAD

Primer is still touring hard. "Oh yeah, I'm enjoying it. That's what I do. I don't get tired."

What keeps him going? "You gotta keep up with the speed, man. You can't sit back. Make CDs, play shows. Stay motivated."

LESSONS FROM A LIFETIME

The advice he's picked up is straightforward: "Be a man of your word. Don't be late. Save your money. Respect people. Be nice to your band-and pay them! You don't pay your band, you ain't got no musician."

13 YEARS WITH MAGIC SLIM

Primer spent over a decade with Magic Slim & the Tear-drops. "He was like a big brother. He'd let me open the show and still give me solos. I didn't know it then, but he was teaching me. He never held me back."

STILL IN THE GROOVE

He remains active in the Chicago scene. "Legends is still holding it down. Some clubs are gone, but the festivals in summer bring the city alive. Young players are coming up. That keeps it going."

Upcoming shows include Buddy Guy's for his album launch, dates with Steve Bell, a stop at the Blues Music Awards in Memphis, then Clarksdale and the East Coast.

THE HEART OF THE BLUES

What does success mean to Primer? "Keeping my chops up and never quitting. I don't think I'll ever retire. Blues is about feeling-good or bad. It heals you. Like John Lee Hooker said, the blues is the healer."

He praises artists like Christone "Kingfish" Ingram for keeping things real. "Young cats doing it right."

WORDS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

For new players, the message is clear: "Learn as much as you can-not just blues, everything. Blues might be simple, but it's all about feeling. That's what makes it hard to play well."

He adds: "Look, learn, and listen. You can't master music. You're always learning. Even if it's the same song every night, something will be different. That's the beauty of it."

GROWN IN MISSISSIPPI

STILL LEARNING

Primer still finds surprises in his playing. “Your brain works in ways you don’t expect. You get ideas. Playing gives you new ones all the time.”

Is it all muscle memory now? “Yeah, it’s in the hands. In the fingers. But the heart, too.”

A MESSAGE TO THE FANS

To Blues Matters readers, Primer says: “Keep on loving the blues. Keep it alive. That support means everything. I’m not just speaking for myself.”

He gives a shout to Texas players like Jimmie Vaughan and Gary Clark Jr. “They help keep it alive. Places like Antone’s in Austin have had the blues forever.”

ONWARD AND ALWAYS THE BLUES

As the conversation wraps up, John’s voice is full of warmth. “Good speaking to you, man. I’ll see you in the UK,” he says with a grin. “Do something for this cold I got!”

John Primer is still touring, still recording, and still preaching the blues. Whether on stage, in the studio, or sitting on a porch in Mississippi, one truth remains:

For John Primer, the blues isn’t just music—it’s a way of life. For further information: www.johnprimerblues.com

EXPLORE



Eric Bibb's Triumphant NYC Return



The blues were in full bloom this spring as legendary and emerging artists alike filled iconic venues across New York City. From Joe's Pub and Terra Blues in the Village to The Cutting Room, Iridium, City Winery, The Town Hall, and The Beacon Theatre, the city was awash in soul, grit, and unforgettable performances.

✍ Abbe Sparks 📷 Arnie Goodman

From Chicago icons Buddy Guy (88) and John Primer (80), to New York natives Taj Mahal (82), Junior Mack (80), and Eric Bibb, to East Coast bluesman Keb' Mo' (73), and Gen X and millennial talents like Susan Tedeschi, Derek Trucks, Danielle Nicole (42), Carolyn Wonderland (53), Jack Broadbent (36), and Davy Knowles (38) – the lineup was a true cross-generational showcase.

Catching Up with Blues and Roots Legend Eric Bibb New York native Eric Bibb, a blues and roots journeyman with over 40 albums to his name, returned to his hometown for a sold-out show at City Winery's Loft. It was a night filled with family, old friends, and longtime fans – a homecoming that felt both nostalgic and electric.

Is it true what they say – once a New Yorker, always a New Yorker?

Yes, this was definitely a homecoming. I hadn't performed in the States for a while and wasn't sure what kind of

vibe I'd get, but I really enjoyed it. I still have family in the city – my twin sister, for one – and old friends like Scott Kuney, who I've been making music with since we were 15. It was also great to see Junior Mack again. They were all at the show.

Tell us about your time in Greenwich Village

The cradle for me was Greenwich Village – the folk and blues scene. When I was a teen, I'd ride the train down to catch gigs. I later moved to Stockholm for ten years, but when I came back in the '80s, I spent most of my time in the Village. I lived on Charles Street for a while and knew the area well. I opened for Etta James and Lester Chambers at The Bitter End, while working night shifts at Colony Records.

You mentioned a chance meeting with G.E. Smith early on.



And someone else's song?

"Needed Time." I first heard it through Taj Mahal after Lightnin' Hopkins did it. It stuck with me.

Your influences?

Taj Mahal was a major pathfinder for me, like Keb' Mo'. I was 16 when I heard The Natch'l Blues. That album was a bridge between generations. In the '60s, I was hugely influenced by Odetta, Son House, Richie Havens, Mavis Staples, and her father.

Top three life-changing moments?

Meeting G.E. Smith was one. Recording with Mavis Staples in 1987 was another. But the most monumental was watching my dad rehearse for Encore in Concert with Leon Bibb in 1963. He was playing with folk legend Stuart Sharp and bassist Bill Lee. Across the room was a little boy – Bill's son – who grew up to be Spike Lee. Watching greatness like that made a lasting impression.

Let's talk about your live show at City Winery

That was a pivotal moment. I was busking outside a bank in Sheridan Square and this guy came up and said, "Don't stop – you're really good." It turned out to be G.E. Smith from Saturday Night Live. That encouragement meant a lot to me.

What was the turning point in your career?

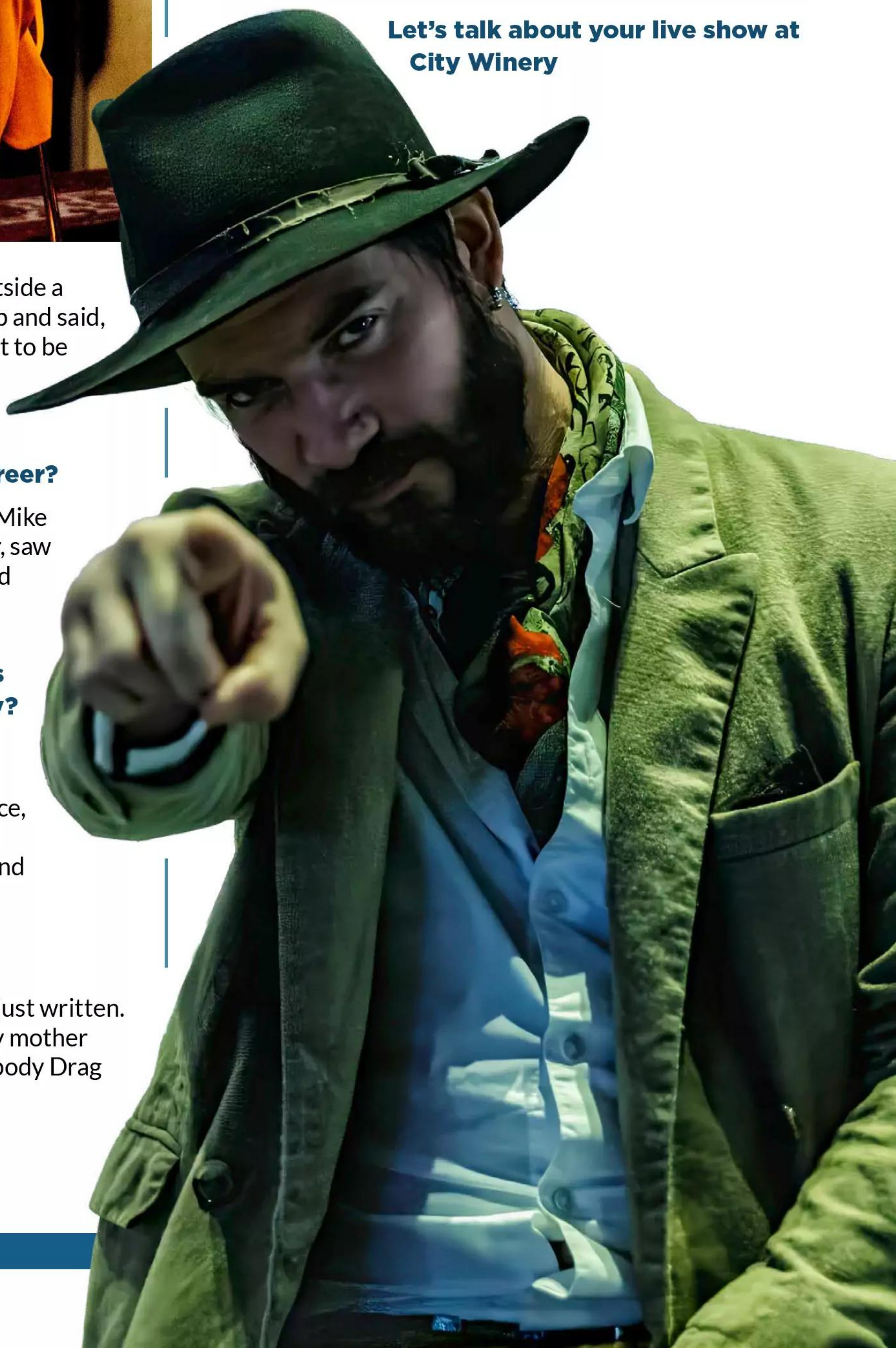
Playing the London Blues Festival was huge. Mike Vernon, the legendary British blues producer, saw me perform. After that, I got a record deal and everything changed.

Why do you think European audiences have embraced your music so strongly?

I think it's my articulation – my music resonates with people who speak English as a second language. Plus, living in Sweden, France, and England helped me understand different ways of thinking. My style of acoustic blues and traditional songs connects with that.

Favourite song of yours?

I'm always most excited about the songs I've just written. But "Shingle by Shingle" is a favourite, and my mother always encouraged me to play "Don't Let Nobody Drag Your Spirit Down." She gave great advice.



It was special. During “The Mole,” I had the whole crowd singing along. That’s what Pete Seeger taught us – the power of communal singing. It brings people together in tough times.

You also performed “Refugee Moan.”

Yes, I sing it often. It’s important to stay connected to the reality that many people are still without homes or safe places. That message matters.

Favourite kind of venue?

I love small, intimate places where people are there to really listen – theatres that suit the music. I’m not too keen on festivals or venues that serve food during the show. The Loft at City Winery had that close, warm vibe.

Tell us about your 2024 album In a Real World

It’s a self-portrait. Musically and thematically, it reflects where my head and heart are right now. I use music to speak about what’s going on in our lives – to offer something healing and entertaining at the same time.

What’s next?

I’ll be releasing new singles this summer and a full album in January 2026. One of the songs was co-written with my former classmate at the High School of Music & Art in New York – Janis Ian.

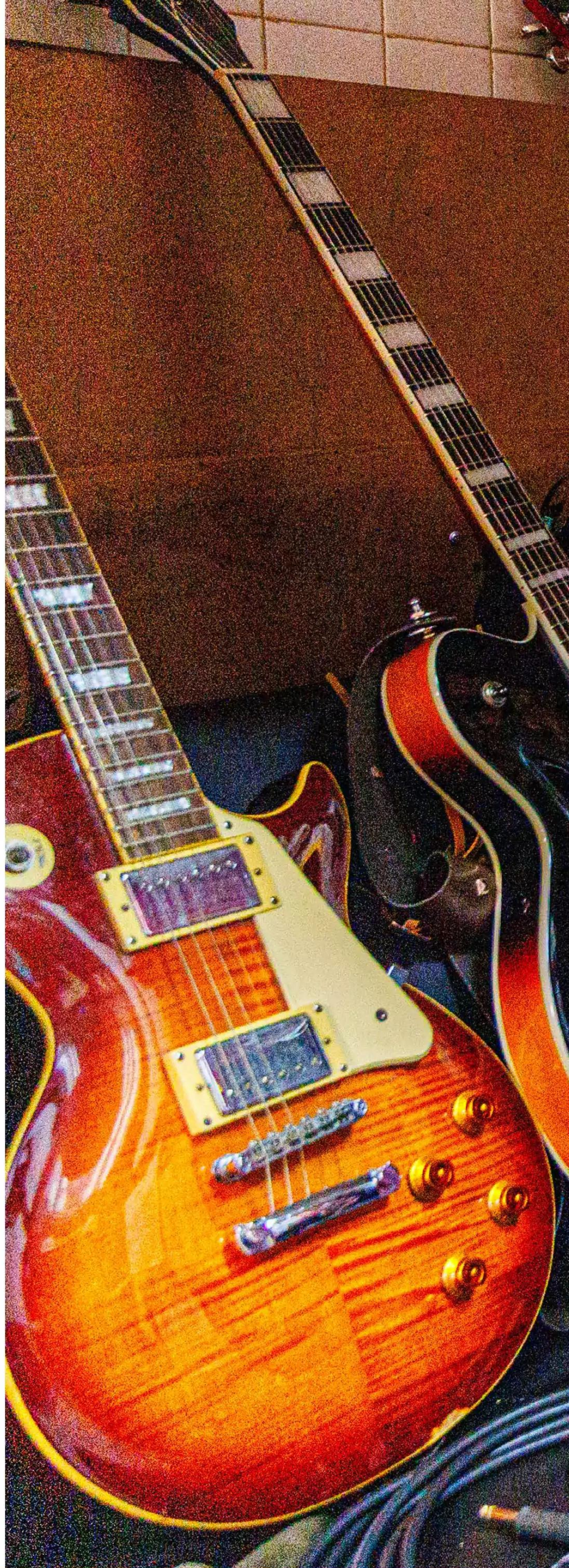
Will you continue carrying the torch of the blues?

Absolutely. I’m honoured to be seen as a pathfinder now. People tell me I’ve inspired them. One woman approached me after an NPR show in West Virginia and said, “You saved my life. Your song kept me going.” That’s the power of music. That’s why I’ll never stop.

Editor’s note:

Also making waves in New York this spring was millennial electric bluesman Davy Knowles, who performed at his regular haunt, The Iridium. Often likened to Rory Gallagher, Knowles represents the modern face of blues. We’ll share our full interview with him in a future issue – stay tuned.

With summer approaching and June being New York’s official Music Month, there’s even more blues on the horizon. Keep your ears open.



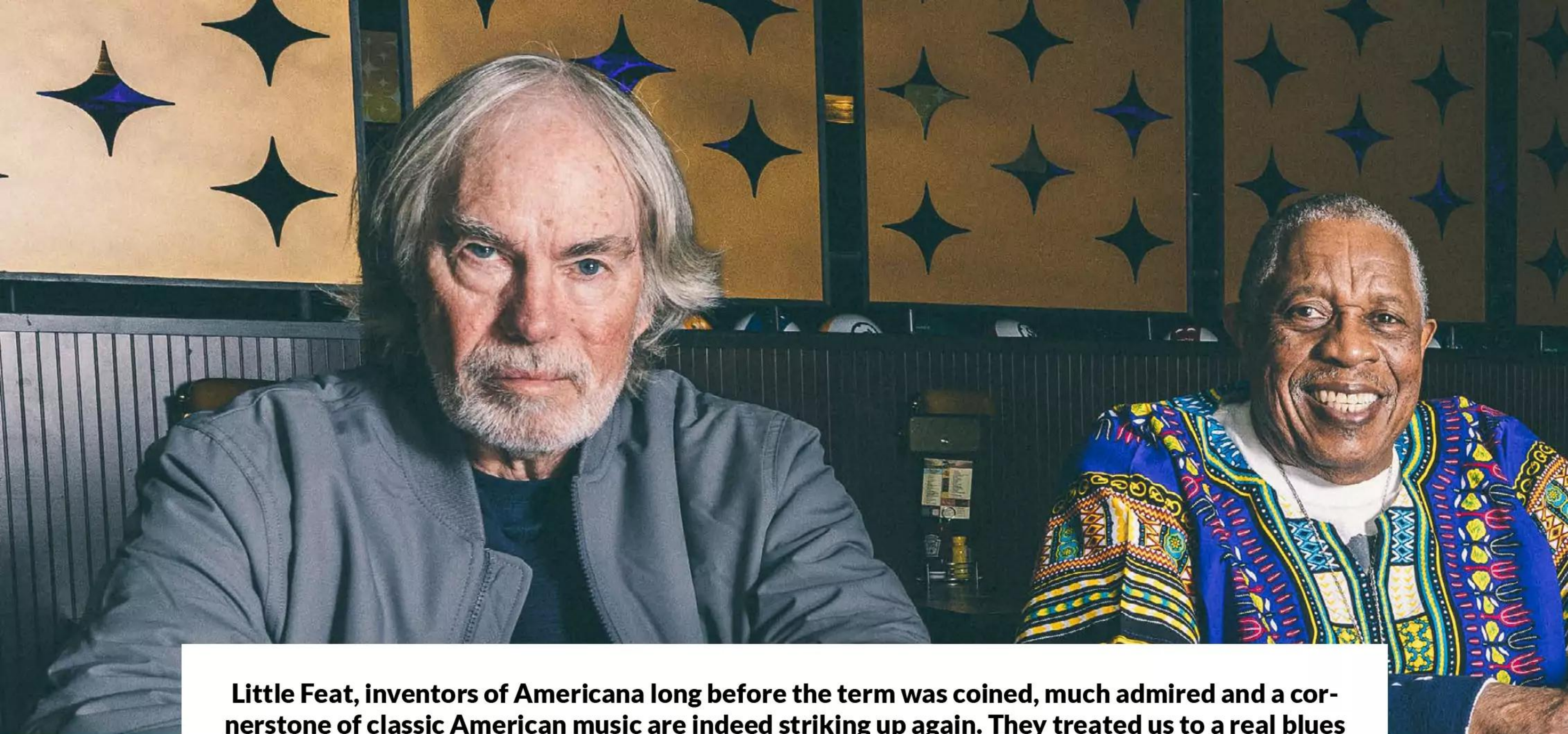


STRIKE UP THE BAND



LITTLE FEAT





Little Feat, inventors of Americana long before the term was coined, much admired and a cornerstone of classic American music are indeed striking up again. They treated us to a real blues album with last years Sams Place and are back re-energised and invigorated with a distinctive Little Feat sounding album, Strike Up The Band.

Pianist and keys player Bill Payne has been there from the beginning, co-founding the band with Lowell George back in 1969. The other original members were bassist Roy Estrado and drummer Richie Hayward. Bill is very much the keeper of the Little Feat flame and would never allow anything that would damage their hard-won legacy.

He explained to me 'Yes, I definitely feel a responsibility in that regard. Little Feat has a long legacy that means a lot not only to the band but the fans too. We've lost people along the way, but we celebrate them along with the fans when we play live. Scott Sharrard has come into the band now as the permanent guitarist since we sadly lost Paul Berrere and he has brought a fresh impetus to us. Doing Sams Place was a good experience for us, it got us playing and recording together, creating the chemistry that has come to the fore with Strike Up The Band. I felt it was very important that this album needed a high bar, in that regard it was similar to when we recorded Let It Roll in 1988.'

Let It Roll was the comeback Little Feat album after the death of Lowell George in 1979 aged just 34. Considered by many to be the driving force of the band it was a devastating blow, although at the time of his death George was promoting his newly released solo album Thanks I'll Eat It Here, and in some interviews had cast doubt over Little Feat continuing. Bill remembers, 'It totally flattened us to be honest. I came out at the time saying, without Lowell George there is no Little Feat. It wasn't that he was the sole creative, we all contributed to the writing and the sound. There had been some criticism that we had somehow reduced Lowell's input, but I would counter that with the fact it took him five years to complete his solo album and that included five covers. We all went our separate ways and did our own things but seven years later after some jamming, we realised that the Little Feat

sound was intact and that we could carry on. Craig Fuller from Pure Prairie League came in and did a great job and Let It Roll was a success. I remember back in the day getting tickets to go see The Yardbirds and being disappointed to find out Jeff Beck wasn't playing, but wow, I discovered Jimmy Page.'

Strike Up The Band has a similar vibrancy. As well as the energy Scott Sharrard brings the band have had collaborative input on the writing by the likes of Charlie Starr of Blackberry Smoke, and Grateful Deads Robert Hunter. Larkin Poe contribute vocals on the title track. Bill tells me, 'This was a fun album to work on, we feel we were on a creative roll. As well as the 13 tracks on the final cut we have almost as many written that gives us a great start towards the next one. We've never had that before. Charlie Starr co-wrote Bayou Mama with me, and we have another with him already written. Vance Powell is a highly gifted producer who has done great work with people like Jason Isbell, his input was invaluable. To me he is a genius.'

"it would be great to showcase his vocals"

Scott Sharrard was originally brought on board by Bill to dep for Paul Berrere initially for a couple of dates due to Pauls ill health. Bill had met Scott on the road, Bill touring with The Doobie Brothers and Scott at the time musical director for the Gregg Allman Band. As fate would have it, on the night of Scott's first appearance Paul passed



away. The shows went ahead, and his new band members wanted him to stay. Prior to that Scott had spent ten years with Gregg Allman, again after initially coming in as a dep. It was as a teenager he had cut his teeth learning his blues chops playing with real bluesmen like Hubert Sumlin, Pinetop Perkins and Luther Allison. Those chops can be heard to the fore on *Sams Place*, his first Little Feat album.

Sams Place certainly has played a major part in getting Little Feat to where they are now. A collection of eight choice blues covers plus a new original that to my mind sounds like a true blues album, something that can't always be said when rock bands decide to release an album dedicated to the blues regardless of how real their love for the genre might be. Bill talked about how that album came to be. 'The idea came to me after a show in Cleveland, I realised we had all put out solo work except Sam (Clayton) and I thought it would be great to showcase his vocals. It took a while to get off the ground but eventually we got funding and set about choosing the songs. The album ended up being recorded at Sam Philips Studio in Memphis, I even got to play on Jerry Lee Lewis piano. It was Scott's first album with us and drummer Tony Leone's first too. I've played on blues albums by people like Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, BB King and John Lee Hooker so I know blues people and Sam is one of them for sure.'

I wondered how difficult it was for someone like Scott or Tony to come into a heritage band like Little Feat, to play those classic songs but also bring their own personality to the group.

'Sure, it can be tough, but these are seasoned musicians, and I want them to sound like Little Feat but also sound like themselves, that's important. When I play sessions or live for different bands I'm there to play, not to be interviewed or audition. You have to go full throttle. Jeff



Porcaro said to me once, if you're not going to throw yourself into it, lay down out of it.'

As well as being a founder member of Little Feat, Bill has toured with The Doobie Brothers and his list of session work is a who's who of rock hierarchy including Jimmy Buffett, Emmylou Harris, Bob Seger, Linda Ronstadt, Jackson Browne, Carly Simon, James Taylor, Bonnie Raitt, Stevie Nicks and many more. No surprise then that Bill is working on his biography, *Carnival Ghosts* which he says might not be a tell all but certainly won't be sugar coated either. It's likely to take two volumes to cover his extensive career. One unexpected episode might be the supergroup Warner Bros proposed putting together that would include Bill and Lowell alongside John Sebastian of the Lovin' Spoonful and Phil Everly. It seems talks reached quite an advanced stage until Phil's wife decided it was a non-starter.

As we ended our well humoured conversation Bill confirmed that he hoped Little Feat would be coming over to Europe and the UK but it was likely to be at least mid-2026. When I conclude these interviews, I usually ask if there is anything I haven't covered that the artist wants to add. Bill told me we were just a few days away from what would have been Lowell George 80th birthday and that he was thinking about him a lot. I'm sure Lowell would be proud of how Bill has taken care of business.



WHICH WAY DO WE GO?

BRANDON SANTINI

With a harmonica in hand and the blues in his blood, Brandon Santini has carved out a name for himself as one of the most dynamic modern blues artists on the scene today. Known for his fiery live performances, soulful vocals, and deep reverence for the traditions of Chicago and Memphis blues, Santini brings fresh energy to a timeless genre.

✍ Colin Campbell 📷 Trells Eye Photography

Blending classic influences with contemporary flair, he's earned acclaim from critics and fans alike, touring extensively across the globe and leaving every stage smoldering in his wake.

In this exclusive interview, we sit down with Santini to talk about his musical journey, the stories behind the songs, and what keeps the blues burning bright in his soul.

THE HARMONICA SPARK THAT LIT A FIRE

Brandon Santini's blues journey began not on a juke joint stage, but in his North Carolina bedroom, ears glued to the radio, feet tapping to the unfamiliar sound of a harmonica screaming through the speakers.

"I was 15 years old, around 1997. I was into pop radio, classic rock, some country, but then I heard the band Blues Traveler. I had never heard harmonica played like that. John Popper was just doing something totally different."

The liner notes from the band's CD revealed that Popper played Hohner Special 20 harmonicas. That was all it took.

"I told my mom, 'Take me to the music store.' I walked in and asked for a 'hunter' Special 20 - mispronounced and all," he laughs. "When they asked what key I wanted, I thought they were joking! I started with a harmonica in the key of D and never looked back."

BACKGROUND

Music quickly became an obsession. Santini immersed himself in the lineage of harmonica legends, tracing Popper's influences back through Paul Butterfield, James Cotton, Little Walter, Big Walter Horton, and Sonny Boy Williamson.

"It was a rite of passage, digging through those names. The blues felt natural to me. I grew up in the South - I was always around that roots music."

Though his first high school "band" mostly jammed in the empty band room, Santini's first real group was The Reverend Jenkins Blues Project. That eventually evolved into Delta Highway, the band that pulled him to Memphis in 2003. It was a defining move for a young man serious about the blues.

"I was 21 and just dived in. I was doing door gigs, sitting in wherever I could - even working as a bouncer at Rum Boogie Café on Beale Street. I was soaking it all up."

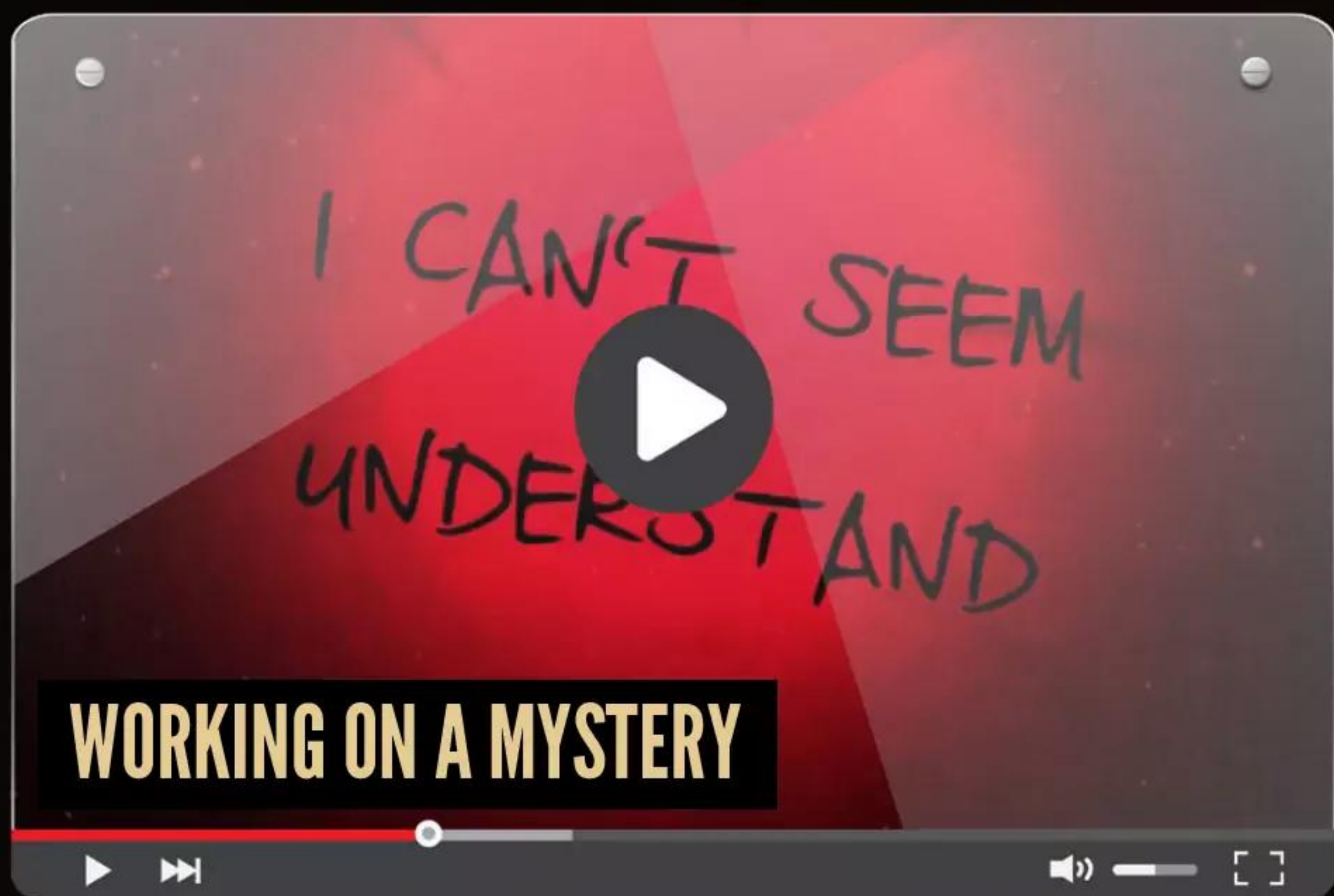
BEALE STREET BLUES UNIVERSITY

If Beale Street was a classroom, Santini was the keen student who arrived early and stayed late.

"It was like going to a blues university. Watching those musicians every night, seeing how they entertained a crowd - that taught me more than any lesson could."

You've got to have a gimmick, a tip song, a shtick, something to make people stop and pay attention. That's how I learned to entertain."

"In blues, the crowds are smaller. There's real access between artist and fan, and that's a beautiful thing. It means something when you can interact with the people who support you."



HARMONICAS, MENTORS, AND MEMPHIS MAGIC

Though he had no formal teacher, one name stands out from his Memphis years: Billy Gibson.

"Billy's a killer player who bridges traditional and progressive styles. He was super generous - gave me CDs, talked harmonica with me, showed me licks. I had a front-row seat most nights as the bouncer at Rum Boogie."

The immersive environment of Memphis, and nearby Clarksdale, became Santini's classroom. "You'd watch these guys and see literal clinics in musicianship and showmanship. That experience shaped how I relate to an audience. It's not just about playing well, it's about entertaining."

A PIVOTAL MOMENT

"The first really cool thing was getting a Blues Music Award nomination in 2009 with my band at the time, Delta Highway. That was huge. The Blues Foundation in Memphis puts those on every year, and it was an honour to be recognised."

"That nomination got us in front of an industry crowd, a new fan base, and even helped us land a booking agent. From 2008 into 2009, it really felt like my arrival into the blues world. Suddenly we were on blues radio, getting covered in blues publications. It was the beginning of everything."

WHY THE BLUES?

"I think the blues chose me. I truly believe it's my God-given purpose to carry the torch. Blues music is vital - not just to American history, but to the human condition. The

originators of the genre went through so much pain and suffering, far more than I'll ever experience. Their stories resonated with me."

"I always encourage people not just to love the music, but to love the stories and the history behind it. I try to write songs for the common man. In a time like now, so politically charged, so unsettled, it feels like the blues is more relevant than ever. I try not to get too political, but it's clear: we need change. The world needs more understanding."

BACK TO MEMPHIS: MAKING WHICH WAY DO WE GO?

"It was great, man. We got to go back to Memphis. In August 2024, I had just returned to the road after back surgery. During a break in the tour, we carved out four days at High Low Recording on Lamar Avenue - deep South Memphis, near Graceland. Real soul, real vibe."

Jeff Jensen produced the album. "He's a longtime friend and collaborator - someone who truly understands me musically. He was able to pull something out of me that others might not."

"We were working with a label budget, so time and efficiency were key, but it all flowed well. The sessions focused on capturing the core band: drums, bass, and guitar. No extra musicians, except some background vocals and Jeff laying down second guitar on a few tracks. I returned in December to cut my vocals and harmonica parts."

"The goal was to capture what we do live - raw, organic, real. And I think we nailed it. It sounds produced, but not overproduced. That's exactly the balance we were after."

SONGWRITING STYLE

"It varies, but a lot of this album was written during the pandemic and the couple of years after. I've got a home studio setup, so I was demoing tracks there, laying down basic ideas with drums, bass, guitar. Usually the groove comes first - some riff or rhythm that feels right. Then maybe a verse or intro, and I build on that. Lyrics often come last."

"Some of these songs sat around for years before they felt finished. Jeff and I had a pre-production meeting in a cabin in West Tennessee, around April or May last year, and we sorted through all the demos to figure out what worked. That helped us shape the final track list and gave us a roadmap going into the studio."

The album wasn't originally going to be called Which Way Do We Go?

"We were going to name it Modern Blues, make a bold statement. But that just felt too vague. We worried it might get lost in search results or misinterpreted."

TAKING IT TO THE STAGE

With all but one song road-tested, Santini says the live reception has been energising.

"They're translating well. The band's killing it. We've been working hard on the harmonies, and even though some of it pushes us musically, the response has been everything we hoped for and more."

VOCAL ROOTS AND RESONANCE

When asked about his vocal influences, Santini's answer is as rich and varied as his stage tone.

"I really love the old blues guys - give me some Howlin' Wolf. But man, Mavis Staples... I love that woman so much. She's my all-time favourite singer."

"Dr. John isn't my favourite vocalist, but people tell me I sound like him. Now I take that as high praise. Lots of heartbreak and lots of Jack Daniel's over the years - I guess that's how my voice matured."

BACK ON THE ROAD: TOURING THROUGH THE PAIN

After a significant back injury, Santini is back on tour. He admits the road isn't getting any easier.

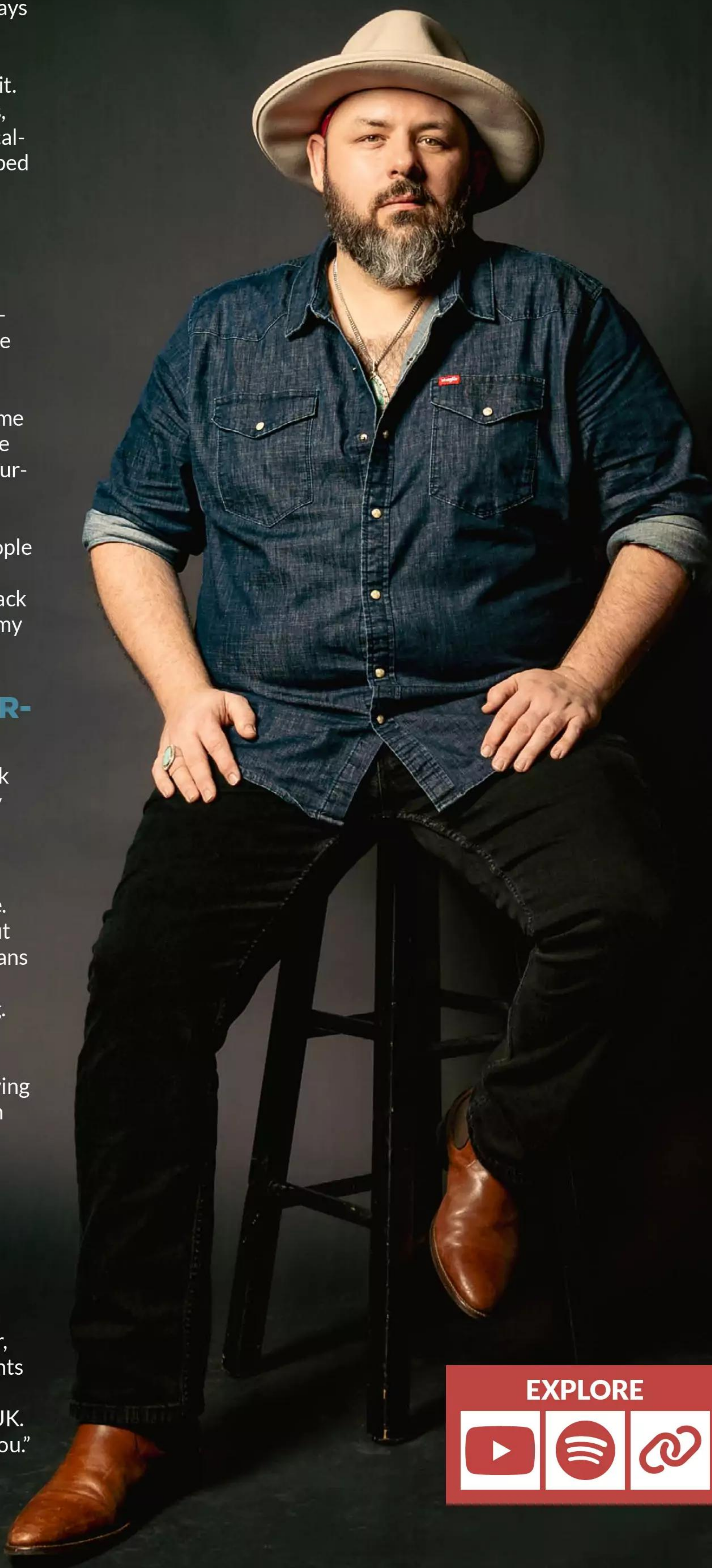
"Even without the injury, touring is more complicated and gruelling than it used to be. But we're back in the swing of things and out supporting the new record. Wherever the fans say they want us, we go. We'd probably pay them to let us come play. Well... just kidding. Mostly," he laughs.

"We'll be on the road, playing shows and trying to lift people's spirits. We just want to reach folks, play good music, and keep the soul of blues alive."

THE HEART OF THE RECORD

Before signing off, Santini reflects on what this new album means to him. "It's not just a harmonica lover's record. We feature guitar, strong songwriting, and some proud moments of musicianship. I just hope people give it a chance. I can't wait to get back over to the UK. I'm always grateful for every single one of you."

For more information, visit:
www.brandonsantini.com



EXPLORE





THE SEASON OF THE WITCH

SHANNON
PEARL

Whatever your path in life or faith you choose to follow, spirituality, nature and the occult have often found a place in contemporary music. Both as a source of inspiration for songwriters and perhaps in the folklore associated with artists following their musical path.

✎ Adam Kennedy

In the blues, you don't have to look much further than the tale of Robert Johnson selling his soul to the devil at the crossroads. These stories give the listener a further insight into the world of their favourite artists.

And whilst Wearside may be several thousand miles east of Mississippi and the crossroads, one artist who is forging her own path whilst channelling her occult influences is Sunderland-based artist Shannon Pearl.

The first six months of 2025 have been fruitful for the award-winning singer/songwriter. So far this year, the viral artist has grown her following on Instagram by an additional 25,000 followers, which has catalysed a run of shows with musical luminaries such as Lene Lovich, Scottish blues legend Dave Arcari, Spanish blues/rock guitarist Susan Santos and a UK tour with prog rock duo the Blackheart Orchestra.

Reflecting on the year so far, "This year has been the craziest year on record for Sharon Pearl. The band has fully evolved to its final form, I would say. And then our live shows are better than ever," explains Shannon. "We are finally reaching the people that we've always wanted to reach with the music. And that's a really nice feeling to be able to find our community - because it's hard when you're in a niche, but it's working, and we're having the best time ever."

Shannon's ethereal sound has been defined as "Witch Pop". The latter is a banner to explain a style of music that is popular with witches. Shannon's brand encompasses elements of many roots-based genres, including blues, neo-folk, rock and progressive music, all of which are stirred in the artist's vast cauldron or melting pot of musical styles and influences.

Pearl cut her teeth on the blues scene in Sunderland, citing The Harbour View Speakeasy hosted by George Shovlin and George Lamb as an integral platform for the artist to pursue her craft. "I love the blues scene," proclaims Shannon. "It's nice to know that the people who you're expecting to maybe be a bit wary of you because you're very niche are actually the ones that throw the arms wide open and really embrace you." Shannon adds: "I'm really grateful for all the blues people who nurtured me when I was a wee baby. George Shovlin and George Lamb and all the guys at the Harbour View have really been a support system for us for a long time."

The ethereal artist was exposed to the blues by delving into her parent's record collection at a young age. "My dad had a Muddy Waters CD. And I always liked the

look of them on the front cover of it," recalls Shannon. "I always used to just go rummaging through my mum and dad's CD rack and just stick an album on while I was doing painting or drawing or something in my loft room. I was an only child for like 11 years. So, I did a lot of entertaining myself."

Shannon adds: "I moved on to delve more into the blues as I got older because I had money and time to buy CDs and listen to more. And my dad also liked Eric Clapton a lot. So that was played in the car and around. And Robert Johnson was my own discovery because his spooky stories came across very quickly."

Performing the blues was catalysed when Shannon started playing in a duo alongside partner and guitarist/drummer John Timney. "Instantly, when we were in that duo, I really wanted to go back to the blues. And I found myself gravitating to covering songs that were quite bluesy and had a lot of storytelling and substance."

The artist began to explore her own sound when she felt that performing traditional blues perhaps didn't feel authentic to her because of its history and origins. "If you look at where the blues originates, it's American, where the slave trade was massive. And it was usually coming from people in so much pain, and you can feel it in the music when you sing it. And I remember thinking at one point, I can't do this anymore," explains Shannon. "I love it. And I feel it on a level, but I shouldn't be singing it because it isn't my music. And that's how I moved away from doing other people's songs and the blues aspect of it. I wanted the feeling of what is authentic to me and what my soul wants to give rather than stealing someone else's story."

Subsequently, from her blues roots, Shannon Pearl has been forging her own path. The artist is regarded as a pioneer in her field and is not afraid to delve into lesser-trodden paths within the music world. An area which Shannon has become renowned for is Kulning. A Scandinavian style of singing, often found in farming cultures to herd cattle.

Shannon went viral on Instagram whilst demonstrating the technique to inquisitive followers. The result was that the artist's reel on the platform received over 2.4 million views. Subsequently, the singer released a collection of Kulning compositions named Fae Fälla at the start of this year. "Fae Fälla has always been in my head to make for a long time. And it was just a nudge from the viral video that I got to actually put it out into the world. It's actually the most successful thing that I've had on Spotify so far," explains Shannon. "I really like how people are connecting

with the folklore behind the songs and the spirituality behind them as well because they're all interconnected with nature and me and my spiritual practice and ancient traditions from Scandinavian countries. So, it's really nice that it all connects within a tiny EP."

The EP follows Shannon Pearl's debut album, *Kiss The Ground*, which was released in 2023. "I had all these songs in my head that I hadn't told anyone about. All the ideas were fully formed in my brain, but I hadn't tried to get them out. And then John bought me a loop station pedal for Christmas one year. And I started making loops of the songs that were in my head. And I decided, by the end of this year, which was 2023, I'm going to have all these songs - at least the bones of them ready to record on the computer. And so, I put loads of pressure on myself and said, I'm going to make an album before I even had the album at all. And we pulled it off," recalls Shannon.

The inspiration for Shannon's compositions are deeply rooted in nature and her spiritual practices. "I think that all the music I listen to is very esoteric and ethereal, and the lyrics are very open to interpretation, and I think I connect with that on a very deep level because it expands your mind rather than confines you to whatever the lyrics are talking about. And I wanted my music to be the same for other people," said Shannon. "They might be inspired by very specific things like a certain valley in Scotland, one of my songs is about, or divine inspiration. But I think the topics are open enough, and the lyrics are left open enough for people to insert themselves and their own personal story within it. And that's always been a goal for me to write songs that are about huge topics, but that can be relatable and accessible for everybody through the spirituality of it all."

From Witch Pop to Witch Rock, Shannon Pearl's first single of the year, *Wolves*, took the artist into new and heavier territories. "I really wanted to go in a bit heavier with *Wolves*. Obviously, I'm from a blues background, and that's not necessarily heavy, but it's heavier than what I'm making now. I added more of a rocky vibe as well with the crunchy guitars in the background on purpose to contrast my very floaty high-register vocals because I feel that's such a beautiful combination. And I like listening to that. So, I wanted to put that in," she said.

Shannon adds: "The story behind that song is basically, I did a lot of research into ancient Britain and how we

used to bury our dead and what respects were taken to do ritually around that. And it was really interesting. And I thought this song had the correct sort of essence to reflect some of those facts that I learned. So apparently, they wouldn't bury people way back when in Britain. They would just leave people in the woods to go back to nature. And I think that's a lovely way of doing it because it's sort of returning to where we came from, which is nature and the earth itself."

Nature is at the heart of Shannon's sound and aesthetic. The artist recently released a remixed version of her song *Halcyon* to tie in with Earth Day this year. "Halcyon, I wrote a long time ago, the piano of it anyway, about 10 years ago. And I was sitting on that song because I knew it was powerful and emotional," explains Shannon. "The narratives in my brain were all about how we're destroying the Earth. But the lyrics didn't come till much later. The song was only fully formed two years ago. But to finally have it out and in the world was great because I released it in 2023. And, I wanted to remix it because since releasing it, we had come into our own performing it, and it sounded a little bit different with the different members of the band. The strings and the nuances weren't there in the original recording. So, I wanted to do it again to do it more justice because I feel like the more you perform it, and the more we destroy the Earth, and the more the song gathers meaning, it's much different. And I wanted to convey that within the recording."

Shannon Pearl released her latest single *Echo* at the end of May. Before the track had even hit streaming platforms, the music video for the song had already picked up an award at the prestigious Sunderland Shorts Film Festival. Speaking of the win, Shannon said: "This is the first award I've won for anything to do with music, and I never would have expected it! The competition was fierce. For years, my woo-woo approach to life has kept me on the periphery of the arts, but this win feels like a step towards acceptance and a small victory for all the creative witches and weirdos out there. Years ago, we would have been persecuted for our

"Everyone is really embracing Witch Pop - and I love it"

EXPLORE



ideas and magic, but now! Wow. I can't believe it."

The song tells the tale of true love that transcends time and space. Inspired by folklore and fantasy, the chorus of this song was written by a then 17-year-old Shannon, reflecting on dreams of finding true love. "We took the narrative of a selkie and forbidden love to go along with it," said Shannon. "It was the kind of love story that you would read in books when you're younger, like fairy tale love. It was about a woman who would wait on the shore while her husband went away to sea. And it was very



romantic in my head. But then, as I grew up and found my own love and had my own trials and tribulations in life, the song in my head sort of flipped a bit to be about my own relationships and how it's developed for me as an adult. So, it's less airy fairy and more about feeling settled and really happy and content in my own love story."

Throughout history, witches have been persecuted for following their beliefs. Being a figurehead of the witchy community in the North East is something that the artist is particularly proud of. "I am quite a prominent member, especially in Sunderland of the witchy community. I lead Moon Circles and spiritual gong baths and things, as well as doing standard gigs. But yeah, I'm really happy with that," said Shannon. "If people fall in and join in with whatever I'm doing. And if people connect on that level, I love that. And I know from experience, from talking to people about it after performances and at the Moon Circles, that everyone is really happy to have someone who is on their side. I know that sounds quite sort of dividing, but it's true that there is a line still. I know it's blurred more and more over the years. There's more acceptance of the weird and the wonderful now than ever has been. But there's still a little bit of prejudice that comes with being a woman and with labelling yourself a witch. That's a hot topic and a buzzword that can go either way. You need to be careful how you use it. But most people are seeing it very positively, and it's having a very positive effect on the communities around me at least."

Perhaps when the general public hears the word witch, they believe it's something to be scared of. Most likely as a result of the images portrayed by television, movies and the annals of history. "My version of a witch is different

than everyone else's, it seems. Witches traditionally were just people who knew how to live alongside nature and knew how to use the plants for medicinal purposes. All the secrets that we've lost over time were always known by the people who would get branded witches. And then witches haven't died out. They're just people. We don't harness magical powers. You believe enough in yourself, and you are confident enough in what you are authentically, and you can give it to the world. That, in my mind, is the form of magic. And that's all I'm doing," explains Shannon. "I'm just ritually and ceremonially marking my life and the milestones that I hit just to make a mental reminder for when I'm old. I think, oh, yeah, I did that on Halloween because it was a big ceremony rather than letting your life pass without making it seem important. Because it is important."

Much like the witchy tales of yore, the story of Robert Johnson and the crossroads has always fascinated Shannon Pearl. "When I was younger, that story grabbed me and I definitely learned a lot of Robert Johnson songs just because every time I would perform them, I'd be like, and this is written by a guy who sold his soul to the devil. And it was always a good icebreaker between me and the audience," explains Shannon. "I love telling that story. And I don't know who's to say what's real and what isn't. But I think the devil and God and good and evil only exist if you believe it does. Anything ever only has power if you believe it, because our minds, and our thoughts are what create things. It wouldn't be very powerful in my mind because I don't believe in the devil."

Shannon has her thoughts on the tale. "Who's to say that he didn't have an epiphany at a crossroads and decide to believe that the devil gave him magical musical powers? His own mind just allowed him access to another part of his brain. So, he would be good at guitar overnight. Who knows, it could have been completely psychological, but whatever works for him. Same for me. I just decided one day, right, I'm not going to be scared anymore to brand myself a witch because that's what I am. It's in my ancestry. It's in my belief system. And I'm just going to be authentic. And I think that might have been what happened to him."

Shannon's live engagements and festival bookings for the rest of the year continue to come in thick and fast. "I've got Lindisfarne Festival and I'm playing the main stage. So, in my head, I can see the main stage and I'm like, oh, I'm really excited. And I can see us dancing about and doing a whole stage show," said Shannon. "We're doing Northern Kin as well. We've got loads of festivals lined up. So, I'm excited to see what else is going to crop up for us to do, because everyone is really embracing Witch Pop and I love it. And that means more opportunities might be on the way and I am ready for it," concludes Shannon.

'Echo' the new single by Shannon Pearl is available now via all major streaming platforms. For further details, including an up-to-date concert schedule, please visit shannonpearlofficial.com

And the winner is.... **THE 2025 BLUES MUSIC AWARDS**

On May 8th, the 46th Blues Music Awards lit up Memphis with shiny zoot suits and glittering gowns as well as the bestowing of glory. For three days, the blues world converged in the historic heart of Memphis - a city steeped in musical legacy - for a celebration filled with showcases, tributes, Blues Hall of Fame ceremony, industry connections, and, ultimately, the prestigious Blues Music Awards and a star-studded award show.

✎ + 📷 Laura Carbone

Presented by The Blues Foundation, the Blues Music Awards are widely recognised as the highest honour in the blues world. Voting is carried out by the Foundation's international membership, making each award a true reflection of the global blues community.

This year, the night firmly belonged to Chicago, as the electrified blues capital racked up multiple major wins. Ronnie Baker Brooks emerged as the evening's biggest winner, taking home three awards including Song of the Year for his autobiographical anthem *Blues In My DNA*. He also claimed Contemporary Blues Album of the Year and Contemporary Male Blues Artist of the Year, cementing his reputation as a modern blues powerhouse.

John Primer reminded everyone that the blues cannot be separated from its Chicago roots, picking up both traditional category wins: Traditional Album of the Year for *Crawlin' Kingsnake*, a collaboration with Bob Corritore, and Traditional Male Blues Artist of the Year.

Veteran harmonica player Billy Branch also brought honours back to the Windy City by winning the Instrumentalist - Harmonica award. And although no longer a resident, Shemekia Copeland - still Chicago through and through - won Album of the Year for her critically acclaimed *Blame It on Eve*.

Elsewhere, Mr. Sipp (aka Castro Coleman) earned the night's most prestigious title, B.B. King Entertainer of the Year, and proved exactly why with a high-energy, show-stopping performance alongside Ronnie Baker Brooks that had the audience dancing in the aisles.

Best Emerging Artist Album went to Piper & The Hard Times for *Revelation*, marking the arrival of a powerful new voice in the blues landscape. Rick Estrin & The Nightcats were named Band of the Year, confirming their

enduring popularity and musical excellence.

In the acoustic categories, Sue Foley was a double winner. Her album *One Guitar Woman* won Acoustic Blues Album of the Year, and she was also named Traditional Blues Female Artist of the Year. The record is a heartfelt tribute to female guitar pioneers and showcases Foley's skill on nylon-string acoustic guitar while exploring traditional styles such as Piedmont and country blues.

On the blues-rock side, Mike Zito won Blues Rock Album of the Year for *Life Is Hard*, while Tommy Castro was named Blues Rock Artist of the Year.

In the Soul Blues categories, Curtis Salgado was honoured as Soul Blues Male Artist of the Year and also won Soul Blues Album of the Year for *Fine By Me*. Soul Blues Female Artist of the Year went to the dynamic Thornetta Davis. Keb' Mo' was chosen as Acoustic Blues Artist of the Year, continuing his legacy as one of the most influential voices in contemporary acoustic blues.

The awards also celebrated the instrumentalists who form the foundation of the blues sound. Legendary 92-year-old Bob Stroger received the Instrumentalist - Bass award. Kenny "Beedy Eyes" Smith was recognised for Instrumentalist - Drums, Eden Brent received the Pinetop Perkins Award for Instrumentalist - Piano, and Vanessa Collier was honoured for her expressive work on horn.

Another standout of the evening was Ruthie Foster, who took home both Contemporary Blues Female Artist of the Year and Vocalist of the Year. Her soulful, powerful voice captivated the judges and audience alike.

Live performances throughout the ceremony brought the awards show to life, with electrifying sets from soloists

and bands representing all corners of the blues world. A highlight came when Mr. Sipp and Ronnie Baker Brooks shared the stage, turning the gala into a high-spirited, joyous dance party. Southern Avenue also delivered a spellbinding set, perfectly capturing the heart and soul of Memphis-based blues.

As the curtain fell, the 46th Blues Music Awards not only celebrated the achievements of the past year, but also honoured the living legacy of the blues - a genre that continues to evolve while remaining deeply rooted in tradition.

Congratulations to all winners and nominees for keeping the blues vibrant, relevant and alive.



Entertainer of the Year, Castro Coleman on Beale Street



Bob Stroger - Instrumentalist Bass as well as Blues Hall of Fame Inductee



Thornetta Davis
wind Soul Blues
Female of the Year

“Ronnie Baker Brooks emerged as a dominant force, taking home three Blues Music Awards”



Piper and the Hard Times - Best Emerging Artist Album

Dancing in the isles when Mr. Sipp performed.



Mr Sipp winning Entertainer of the Year



Kingfish walking to receive Best Instrumentalist in Guitar



Sue Foley double win for Best Acoustic Album and Traditional Blues Female Artist



Southern Avenue on stage doing it Memphis style

"Rick Estrin elated winning Band of the Year with the Nightcats"



THE WINNERS...

MAJOR CATEGORIES

Album of the Year:
Blame It On Eve – Shemekia Copeland

B.B. King Entertainer of the Year:
Mr. Sipp (Castro Coleman)

Band of the Year:
Rick Estrin & The Nightcats

Best Emerging Artist Album:
Revelation – Piper & The Hard Times

Song of the Year:
Blues In My DNA – written and performed by Ronnie Baker Brooks

BLUES CATEGORY AWARDS

Blues Rock Album:
Life Is Hard – Mike Zito

Blues Rock Artist:
Tommy Castro

Contemporary Blues Album:
Blues In My DNA – Ronnie Baker Brooks

Contemporary Blues Female Artist:
Ruthie Foster

Contemporary Blues Male Artist:
Ronnie Baker Brooks

Soul Blues Album:
Fine By Me – Curtis Salgado

Soul Blues Female Artist:
Thornetta Davis

Soul Blues Male Artist:
Curtis Salgado

Traditional Blues Album:
Crawlin' Kingsnake – John Primer & Bob Corritore

Traditional Blues Female Artist:
Sue Foley

Traditional Blues Male Artist:
John Primer

INSTRUMENTAL-IST AWARDS

Guitar:
Christone "Kingfish" Ingram

Harmonica:
Billy Branch

Horn:
Vanessa Collier

Piano (Pinetop Perkins Award):
Eden Brent

Bass:
Bob Stroger

Drums:
Kenny "Beedy Eyes" Smith

Vocals:
Ruthie Foster

ACOUSTIC CATEGORIES

Acoustic Blues Album:
One Guitar Woman – Sue Foley

Acoustic Blues Artist:
Keb' Mo'

Eden Brent joyous winning the Pinetop Perkins Award for Piano

BACK IN BLACK

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR

British blues-rock sensation Joanne Shaw Taylor will release her highly anticipated 10th studio album, *Black & Gold*, on June 6th via Joe Bonamassa's Journeyman Records.

✍ Adam Kennedy 📷 Stacie Huckeba

For her latest offering, the esteemed artist has once again reunited with iconic producer Kevin Shirley. With *Black & Gold*, Taylor effortlessly blends blues-rock with influences from Americana, indie rock, and retro '80s pop.

Taylor's forthcoming album will be released almost a year to the day after her last album, *Heavy Soul*. With two long players in quick succession, would Joanne say that she is in a creative place presently? "Yeah - actually, we've got the best part of another album in the can. We've got about three or four more tracks to record in August. And I'm doing something in the studio on Thursday, a little EP thing. So, at the moment, it feels good," proclaims Joanne. "I chalked that up maybe to Covid and being off for so long. And particularly for someone who's been doing this from quite a young age, to be forced to stop suddenly and have pretty much two and a half years off. I think I'm making up for the work I probably would have done in that time. I'm sure it would run out at some point, and it would be like, hey, maybe we should do an album every 18 months."

Joanne adds: "I'm very happy with the quality of the stuff we've put out, the quality of the music. I think at the moment, I'm not just shoving out anything for the sake of creativity. But obviously, if that runs out, then it might be time to reel it in. But so far, I'm feeling pretty good."

Black & Gold marks a milestone for Joanne Shaw Taylor in that it's the artist's 10th studio album. But with such a back catalogue to pick from, how will Joanne go about choosing a setlist for her shows? "I've pretty much accepted I'm never going to make everybody happy at this point. I've also enlisted Kevin Shirley to help me with the setlist for the upcoming tour beyond this to support this in September."

Joanne continues: "It's funny, you're right about it being

the 10th. I think that's what helped me with this album because the last album was kind of an interesting one. Going back to talking about being able to be creative and put stuff out. We'd done *Nobody's Fool*, which was kind of quite a poppy album for me. So, it was fun to do *Heavy Soul*, because, for me, the challenge was going from a pop album back into a roots album and making it kind of flow together. And then this 10th one for me, I don't know if it is because I suffer from OCD. It did feel like I wanted it very much to sum up the first decade of my recording career, plus I was turning 40. So, going into a fresh decade myself, it was kind of a fun one to be able to do everything I'd always wanted to do. Songs I hadn't thought about releasing before or I thought were too poppy or too heavy. And also, closing the chapter. And is there anything I want to readdress in my personal life that I feel I need to talk about? So that's kind of behind me now, moving into the fresh decade."

There is perhaps a duality to the title of JST's new album. The words themselves indicate shades of darkness and light. But what was the artist thinking about specifically with regard to the title? "Again, going back to my OCD, I've got a thing about the number three. So, I have predominantly tried most of my albums to be three syllables. So *White Sugar*, *Dirty Truth*, *Heavy Soul*, *Reckless Heart*, *Black and Gold*. So, if there is a three-syllable song title, it's always going to be my favourite. But particularly with *Black and Gold*, it was just that nice juxtaposition, dark and light," explains Joanne. "And for someone who is a self-proclaimed blues guitarist, soul singer and kind of pop rock writer, for me, it's always that balancing act for me of blues, which is a very emotional, deep art form that's come from this history of suppression. And it's the fact that I love writing catchy pop songs. So, I just really kind of like that juxtaposition of dark and light, I suppose. Plus, *Harry Potter*. I've got to mention *Harry Potter* in every interview."





The writing on *Black & Gold* comes from real-life experiences. Does Joanne prefer to write from a personal place? “I wouldn’t say it’s a preference so much as sometimes it’s something you have to get off your chest or need to process, which, again, is why I write songs. It’s essentially free therapy. It’s to process my own emotions. And, I know I’m very fortunate to do that, whether it’s like *Who’s Gonna Love Me Now*, which is about grief or the grief of someone who’s passed away or the grief of a friendship. I’m very fortunate that I get to write it all down and process my emotions that way and feel better about it afterwards,” explains Joanne. “Most people don’t get that. So it’s important to me personally. And then it’s also important to me because I know most people in the audience have been through those things, and they don’t get to do that. They just have to suffer it or come to terms with it somehow. So hopefully, it’s helping other people in a way. And I think every song, whether it’s very obviously something

I wanted to process or if it’s just a song I’ve written, you still draw on real-life experience. Because, at the end of the day, my job is to make people feel something. So, if I can feel it first, it’s going to translate better to them.”

For her latest record, Joanne Shaw Taylor once again enlisted the help of superstar producer Kevin Shirley. With each release, their creative relationship continues to blossom. “It’s just getting easier and easier. We have always been good friends, but now I’m spending such a great amount of time with him. And on such an important thing to me and an important thing to him, that we’ve become very good mates,” said Joanne. “And the band we’ve been using is just absolutely fantastic; it’s really gelling as a unit. It’s become a really easy way of recording, which when I say easy, I mean that just the band and him, Kevin, are so brilliant that it’s and such great personalities that there’s no challenge. There’s just people excited to turn up and play music together.”

Joanne continues: “The thing I love about Kevin, I mean, Kevin’s brilliant at what he does. He’s a fantastic producer. He’s got a great ear, but also, what is really important for a producer. He’s really easy to work with, and I would say this to younger artists. People can be very protective over their songs, what they’re hearing and how they want to hear it. And going in with a producer, you’ve got to have that level of trust that. I could give these 10 songs to Rick Rubin or Joe Bonamassa. And it would be a different album to the one if I gave the 10 songs to Kevin - it’s very much a

EXPLORE



collaboration. So, there's no point being defensive over it too much, or else you may as well just produce it yourself. But what's lovely about Kevin is there is always that reassurance that, he'll change something and then he'll privately ask are you OK with this because this is your album? I'm willing to try it. It's just that constant reassurance. The most important thing to him is that you are happy."

With the unveiling of *Black & Gold* just around the corner, how is Joanne feeling ahead of the release? "I'm definitely excited. I haven't seen a physical copy yet. And particularly with how we're doing things with like this releasing pretty much every song as a single, it kind of feels a bit anticlimactic," explains Joanne. "I found last time with *Heavy Soul*, on the day, I realised how much it meant to people to be able to get the physical copy. And so, I'm kind of looking forward to hearing that. And if it's what everyone was hoping for and usually at the moment, most of the feedback is - will there be a picture of Hank in the liner notes, which is the main thing people really care about."

"it was never intentional on my part to not be a traditional blues artist"

Joanne reflects: "It's sending your child off into the world and you can't take it back then. So, it's always a bit nerve-wracking. But, thinking back to when I was a kid as well and wanting to do this, the fact that I'm from Solihull and I live in America and I've managed to have a career as a somewhat respected blues artist and I have 10 albums out. It's pretty special."

Joanne Shaw Taylor isn't afraid to push the boundaries of blues/rock. "I think for the most part, it was never intentional on my part to not be a traditional blues artist. It was just more of a necessity. I mean, again, I think if I'd

been born a man, I would have been a different artist. But, I was a 13 to 16-year-old when I was studying music. And, being self-taught, guitars are a gender-neutral instrument. I could try and sound like bits of Albert Collins or steal a bit from B.B. King or Lindsay Buckingham or Paul Weller. But when it came to singing, I was never going to have that voice. I was never going to sound like Muddy Waters. So, I had to find female influences to try and copy. And they tended to be outside of the blues. You know, Tina Turner, Christine McVie. And then when it came to songwriting as well, I was never going to write *Good Morning, Little School Girl* or *Smokestack Lightning*. It wasn't my experience. So, it was more of a necessity for me to find out who I was as an artist as opposed to just trying to fake it and be a bad blues singer. So, no, I don't intentionally push boundaries."

Joanne adds: "I think what I try and do is just what feels good to me, to be honest, what is right. Certain things I want to say, it's always going to be a mixture. I don't want to do a whole album of just guitar because it's boring to me. I love a good song. And the main thing is songs for me."

Joanne Shaw Taylor has been out on the road across the US during 2025. Reflecting on the tour the artist said: "It was brilliant. It was long because we started with the cruise, which there's nothing like starting a whole month tour with five days on a cruise ship with Robert Jon and The Wreck and 20 other bands. But no, it was brilliant. I've got a great team around me. Audiences seem really energetic at all the venues. And we are noticing ticket sales. It's, every time we go back, there's like another hundred people, more and more people asking to see Hank. So, no, it's been great. And then I went to New Orleans to do Jazz Fest with Taj. So that was a pretty big bucket list kind of gig. So no, it's all been really positive."

But perhaps the question on the lips of Joanne's UK fans is are there any plans to tour on our shores any time soon? "We are working on it at the moment... I think they're finishing off and then there'll be an announcement," she says. "The UK and hopefully a little bit of Europe. It feels like a long time since I've toured there. I know it was only last year, but it feels a bit too long. I'm itching to come home."

With a new album in the bag, it looks like it's going to be busy for the remainder of the year and beyond for JST. "We've got a bunch of dates for the summer. Alaska cruise, probably UK, Europe, then back to the States, Christmas. And then I'm sure I'll be back in the studio and obviously pretty much got this album for next year ready. So hopefully touch wood, everything goes well, and I stay healthy. I'll be doing the same thing I'm always doing, which is being obnoxiously loud on a telecaster and dragging my sausage dog around the world."

Joanne Shaw Taylor's new album "*Black & Gold*" is released by Journeyman Records on June 6th. The album is available from www.joanneshawtaylor.com

COLIN & ROBBIE



IN THE US OF A

PART 1: MEMPHIS TO CLARKSDALE

“What are you doing next week?”

“Not much,” says I...

Welcome to a special three-part series capturing an unforgettable journey through the American South, taken by photographer and writer Colin Campbell alongside blues musician Robbie Reay. Over the next three issues, we'll follow their week-long adventure from Memphis to Clarksdale and beyond, exploring legendary venues, meeting blues icons, and tracing the roots of the music that continues to shape the world. Packed with colour, culture and unexpected encounters, this story is a heartfelt homage to the spirit of the blues and the people who keep it alive.

DAY 1: FROM EYEMOUTH TO THE DELTA

That was it. Over coffee on a cold Eyemouth afternoon, a spontaneous conversation turned into a blues pilgrimage. Within a week, we had flights booked, a car hired, and accommodation arranged in Memphis. The plan was loose, but the mission was clear.

After a long day of travel involving three flights, we landed at Memphis International late on 19th March and picked up our blue Nissan Rogue. We grabbed a few hours' sleep at La Quinta Hotel before the adventure began in earnest the next morning.

First stop: a Memphis shooting range. Not your typical blues tour opener, but a brilliant way to shake off the jet lag. Then it was on to Guitar Center in Bartlett, where Robbie picked out a hired guitar for the trip, settling on a black Recording King acoustic-electric. Grant, the staff member, was incredibly helpful and got us sorted for the road.

With Highway 61 calling, we headed south toward Clarksdale, stopping off at the Gateway to the Blues Museum in Tunica. Among the artefacts were Albert King's fedora and a resonator linked to Charley Patton. The trip had truly begun.

At the crossroads of Highways 61 and 49, we pulled into Abe's BBQ for an unforgettable pork sandwich before continuing to Blues Town Music. There we met Ronnie Drew, a local luthier who kindly adjusted the guitar for slide playing and welcomed us into his fascinating shop filled with rare instruments.

Next came Deak's Mississippi Saxophones and Blues Emporium. Deak Harp is a harmonica master and blues historian with a heart as big as his collection. His stories, instruments and hospitality made a lasting impression.

We finished the day wandering Clarksdale, catching glimpses of blues history at every turn, including the iconic Riverside Hotel. That night, Robbie joined Big T and the Family Band on stage at Ground Zero Blues Club, with Deak Harp joining the set. An unforgettable way to kick off the tour.

DAY 2: ROYAL ENCOUNTERS ON BEALE

We headed back up to Memphis for a day on Beale Street. Within minutes of arriving, we found ourselves speaking with Memphis James, rhythm guitarist for Albert King. A chance meeting, but a memorable one.

The street was buzzing with live music and historic landmarks. We visited the W.C. Handy Home and Museum, browsed the curious shelves of A. Schwab's, and stopped for lunch at B.B. King's Blues Club. By pure coincidence, we were seated beneath a photo of Albert King, a sign if ever there was one.

The afternoon brought a more reflective tone with a visit to the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel. It's impossible to describe the emotional weight of the place, but it added a deeper layer to our understanding of the music and the struggles behind it.

Later that evening, we returned to Beale and ended up at Rum Boogie Café, where Robbie was invited to jam with



the house band FreeWorld. Their set was powerful and packed with soul, and Robbie's original tune Juke Joint Boogie went down a storm.

Two days in and already the experience was exceeding every expectation.

For some live music and more photos of the tour, check out the video on the right.

TO BE CONTINUED...



LOOK OUT HIGHWAY

CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE

Charlie Musselwhite is a legendary figure in the blues world, renowned for his deeply expressive harmonica playing and soulful voice. With a career spanning over five decades, Musselwhite has become a torchbearer of the electric blues tradition, bridging the gap between the genre's Delta roots and its modern evolution.

✎ Colin Campbell

📷 Michael Weintrob

Born in Mississippi and raised in Memphis, his music carries the grit and authenticity of the South, yet his journey from Chicago's smoky clubs to international stages, reflects the global impact of the blues. In this exclusive interview for Blues Matters from his home in Clarksdale, Charlie shares stories about his musical journey and more...

A Young Boy and the Blues

When asked what made him want to become a musician, Charlie Musselwhite doesn't hesitate. "I didn't really think about wanting to be a musician, I just loved the music." Growing up in Memphis, Musselwhite immersed himself in the blues, not by performing, but by listening. Scouring junk stores for old 78s, he discovered the music that would shape his life. "I remember thinking, this sounds so good to listen to. I bet it feels good to play like that," he recalls. Inspired by the joy and depth of Sonny Boy Williamson's harmonica, young Charlie took his harp out to the woods, playing where no one could hear him.

"I didn't have any goal to be on stage. I didn't think anything like that was possible. I mean, this is old blues, who's going to listen to that?" As a child, Musselwhite was fascinated by the street singers of Memphis. Too shy to speak to them, he observed from a distance. Over time, however, he came to know some of the greats; Furry Lewis, Will Shade, and Willie Baum, the latter of whom gave him his first harmonica rack. But the idea of music as a career was still far from his mind. "I was just having fun, if I had known this would lead somewhere, I'd have paid a lot more attention."

Chicago: Factory Dreams and Blues Realities
At 18, Musselwhite left Mississippi for Chicago, not for music, but for factory work. "I thought I'd go up there and get me one of those big old factory jobs," he explains. Fate, however, had other plans. Working as a driver for an exterminator, he quickly learned the city's layout and began noticing club posters with names he knew from his record collection: Muddy Waters, Elmore James. "I couldn't believe it, my blues heroes, right



**LISTEN**
TO THIS INTERVIEW

 **YOUTUBE**



***“this is old blues -
who’s going to listen to that?”***

here in Chicago.” Still, Musselwhite kept quiet about his playing, content to be seen as a fan. That changed when a waitress told Muddy Waters that Charlie could play. “When he found out, he insisted I sit in, and that changed everything.”

Suddenly, Charlie’s harp had currency. Other musicians heard him and began offering gigs. “You’re going to pay me to play harmonica? Wow.” It was the turning point that shifted Musselwhite from labourer to artist. “This was my ticket out of the factory.” Asked about his first real gig, Musselwhite chuckles. “I don’t remember. I wish



I’d kept a diary. I thought I’d remember everything, silly me.” He does recall rooming with Big Joe Williams and getting invited to tag along for shows, laying the groundwork for a lasting career.

That first time on stage with Muddy Waters still stands out. “He’s singing, I’m playing, and I’m thinking, ‘How the hell did I get here?’ I’m just a hillbilly from Mississippi,” he says. But being accepted in Chicago’s Black clubs brought him joy and belonging. “That was good enough for me.” Despite the potential for racial tension, Musselwhite never felt out of place. “The musicians looked out for me. Little Walter would give me rides home or wait for the bus to make sure I got on safely. People might think, being from Mississippi, I’d be a redneck. But that’s not how I was raised.”

The Big Break and the Chicago Blues Boom

Musselwhite’s real break came when producer Sam Charters recorded his debut album. At the time, Charlie was working at Jazz Record Mart, selling records, and rubbing elbows with the city’s blues elite. “It was just a great place to be,” he remembers. As for the Chicago blues scene of the time? “Oh, it was loaded,” he says with a grin. “I’d drive around the South Side on summer nights with the windows down, just listening for music coming out of bars. If I heard something, I’d pull over and go in. Often, you’d run into a bar and there’d be a little trio playing. Talk to them on the break and you’d find out they were from Arkansas or something, just visiting relatives and picked up a gig next door for tips. That was how much blues there was!

You never knew where you’d hear it. Even if they were primitive, didn’t have records or recognition, they were playing real blues, with real feeling. That’s what counted. Back then, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Sonny Boy, John Lee Hooker, Little Walter; they all came through town. I was lucky to be there when I was.”

Reflecting about Muddy Waters

“He was always supportive. I wish I’d spent more time with him, but I was young, just living in the moment. Still, every time I saw Muddy, he’d invite me to sit in. Somewhere there’s a tape of us playing together on a radio show, I’ve got to find that someday. All those guys, Wolf, Walter, Hooker they were welcoming. They encouraged me to sing, even when I didn’t want to. They gave me faith. Muddy would introduce me as “Charlie, he’s from down home.” That meant something. It meant I wasn’t just some white kid from up north, I was part of the family, in a way.”

Recording ‘Stand Back’ and the Start of a Career

When blues historian Sam Charters came to town, he knew I could get him into the clubs safely. They knew me, so anyone with me had to be okay. He’d seen me play with Shakey Horton, and that’s how I got on Chicago/The Blues/Today! That led to him asking if I wanted to make a whole album. I said, “Sure, I guess.” Called up some guys, we met in the studio. They told us we had three hours. We recorded Stand Back! in under three. That was it. That album put me on the road and gave me a career.

Why the Harmonica?

I love guitar too and I’ve recorded with it, but the harmonica is more like a voice. You breathe into it. When I solo, it’s like I’m singing without words. It’s personal, intimate. I loved the way it sounded on those old 78s, Sonny Boy, Little Willie Foster, and yeah, even Little Walter. Funny, at first Walter sounded too much like rock ‘n’ roll to me. I had to grow into him. But there’s nothing like the harmonica. Nothing to compare it to. You know, it’s the only instrument you can’t see how it’s played. No fretboard, no visual cues. You just listen and experiment. One night at Rose and Kelly’s, played there all the time with Johnny Young. Shakey Horton had two harps, back-to-back. He did this big flourish, switched harmonicas, and played patterns I’d never heard. I asked him what he was doing. Turns out, he was playing in fourth position, key of A on a C harp. I’d never heard of that before. Later, I saw Little Walter and told him about it. He shrugged and said, “That ain’t nothing. You can play E on a C harp too.” Fifth position. Even if you don’t use those positions, just knowing them expands your inner map of the harmonica.

You have to follow your heart, being a musician. Don’t play to impress. Play what you feel. Sure, copy others to learn, but don’t stop there. Find your voice. If you keep showing up, it’ll reveal itself.

From Smoky Bars to Generational Festivals

I used to tour coast to coast in a van, bar to bar. I love the little places, people drinking, dancing, having a good time. But festivals? They're the best. Whole families come out. I've had folks tell me, "We met at one of your shows 30 years ago, now we're bringing our grandkids to hear you. I also like performing Arts Centres. They treat you well, and it's a comfortable setup. But wherever I'm playing, if people are listening and feeling it, that's home."

Maxwell Street Memories

"I really miss playing on Maxwell Street. That was that just the greatest. You didn't make much money, but man, what a... I don't even know how to explain it. You know, you'd start at nine in the morning, but we'd get there around 7:30 or 8, hit the bootlegger, get a pint of 20% wine to shake off the hangover from the night before, then play till about 2:30 or 3 in the afternoon." It wasn't about the money. It was about something deeper. "Playing with Johnny Young, Carey Bell, Johnny Anderson, Robert Nighthawk, everyone was there. Folks from down South huddled around, dancing, drinking, raising hell. Dust flying up. That was the real deal. The real blues, right out of the earth, so funky."

The Drive to Keep Playing

So, what keeps a bluesman going after decades in the game? "My manager, Henrietta, for one," he laughs. "But really, it's the music itself. It means so much to me. Even if none of this had happened, no records, no fame, I'd still be playing. Because I love the music. That's what it's about."

Mississippi Meets Chicago

"Mississippi and Chicago, they're different blues worlds. It's not like it was. I haven't been to Chicago in a while. They've still got the Blues Fest and some clubs, but it's a whole different scene now. Here in Clarksdale, though? Live blues every night of the week, all year round. Me and Big Joe Williams were rooming together, first at the Jazz Record Mart. I beat up Bob Koester, the guy running it, and had to move. Joe didn't like him either. So, when he got back to town and found out I'd moved, he packed up and moved, too. There was this little bar, Big John's, in Old Town. They thought Joe was a folk singer and hired us for a 4th of July gig. Business was so good, they brought us back the next night. It turned into a regular gig."

And soon, the blues spread like wildfire. "Bloomfield started hanging out, then we added drums and bass. It just grew. More people came. We told the owners: book

Muddy, Wolf, Little Walter. They listened. Business exploded. Walls came down. Other clubs followed. The whole blues scene shifted from South to North Side. That all started with me and Big Joe playing that holiday. We flipped the whole thing."



Mike Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop: Friends and Fire

What was Mike Bloomfield like? "A madman never knew anyone like him. He could quote a book from memory. Play any style. He'd sit on the couch, tear out pages from paperbacks and eat them. Literally."

One story borders the surreal. "We were coming back from New York. Mike's spitting out the window the whole way. When we got out in Chicago, the paint was eaten off the car. That's when I realised something chemical was going on. But he was also one of the funniest people I ever met. Big liar, too he would tell stories I told him back to me. I'd let him finish, just to watch him go."

As for Elvin Bishop, there's a different tone, one of warmth and camaraderie. "Elvin's a great guy. We've talked about doing another album. Nothing solid yet, but I'll see him soon—we've got a string of shows. It's just me and him trading tunes and stories. Bob Welsh backs us up on piano or guitar. It's a trio, and it's a lot of fun."

At 81 years old, Charlie Musselwhite sits down with the same relaxed authority that's made him a revered figure in blues for decades. "I'm either in the bonus round or the home stretch," he chuckles, "but I'm still doing it and loving it."



Songs with Stories...

Each song on the new release carries a piece of Musselwhite's life. Sad Eyes, he explains, came from bandmates Randy Bermudez and Matt Stubbs, who handed him a melody. "The words just came to me."

Storm Warning is a track that's nearly three decades old. "I always liked a formidable woman," he laughs. "I had that one lying around for years. Didn't even remember writing it."

Then there's **Highway 61**, a road deeply embedded in Musselwhite's story. "Growing up in Memphis, with family down in Clarksdale, 61 was always part of my world. It's like the arteries of the blues 61, 51; they run from the South all the way to Chicago."
Writing What You Know

Ramblin' Is My Game and **Open Road** share Musselwhite's recurring theme: the journey. "I write about what I know. I can't sing about something I don't relate to."

Open Road was first recorded with a Cuban band, but Musselwhite reimagined it as a straight-ahead blues. "I liked the lyrics too much to leave behind," he explains.

Another standout, **Ghosts of Memphis**, came from reflecting on how much his hometown has changed. "It's not the city I grew up in. All the people I knew are gone. It feels like a city full of ghosts now." He even brought in Memphis rapper Al Kapone to lay down a verse. "He's deep into blues. I think he did a great job."

"My dad gave me a guitar when I was 13," he says. "But in Chicago, there were so many guitar players. Not many harp players. I found my lane." Still, his guitar chops shine on this record, especially on the instrumental **Blue Lounge**. "I tried singing over it, but it just wanted to be an instrumental," he says. His slide playing was inspired by the great Robert Nighthawk. "He played in natural tuning, and I liked that sound. I don't play like him, but you can hear the influence."

The album also features a standout duet: **Ready for Times to Get Better**, a bluesy spin on a country tune featuring local Clarksdale singer Edna Lockett. "She sings down at Red's Lounge once a week, she's got it! I just had to blues up the melody a little."

Some of the tunes have already been "road-tested," including **Storm Warning**, **Blue Lounge**, and **Hip Shakin' Mama**. That last one, Musselwhite admits, came simply from watching women dance in the crowd. "There's no deep story. Just one of those things that pops into your head."

But as he explains, that's what makes the blues so powerful: connection. "It's the audience, the band, the room—it's all one spirit. We're all together."

EXPLORE



“Don’t play to impress. Play what you feel”

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The Making of Look Out! Highway

The new album was born during a strange and quiet time: the early days of the pandemic. Fresh off a gig at the Iridium in New York City, Musselwhite and his band headed into Kid Anderson's Greaseland studio. "We had time on our hands, places were shutting down, touring stopped. So, we went straight into the studio and cut the tracks." Later, in Clarksdale, Mississippi his adopted home, he fine-tuned the recordings.

A Beat from a Memphis Church

Asked about the origin of the title track, Look Out highway Musselwhite grins: "I just wrote it. I don't always know where the lyrics come from, they just appear. That beat came from a church I heard in Memphis once. It stuck with me. One day the lyrics just surfaced." His creative process is scattered, spontaneous. "I've got drawers and filing cabinets full of scraps," he says. "Matchbook covers, napkins, whatever I can grab to jot something down. When I'm writing, I dig through until I find something that fits."

Blues for the Next Generation

Musselwhite is heartened by the rise of young Black blues players who are carrying the torch with respect and authenticity. "They're not trying to be guitar shredders. They're playing with the subtleties of country blues." He cites Rell Davenport and Jontavious Willis, as powerful examples. "It gives me faith that the blues is in good hands."

The Blues Is a Way of Life

"It's a spirit... in blues, it's not 'my baby left me, I'm going to kill myself,' it's 'my baby left me, I'm going to get me a new baby!' The blues is about keeping on, no matter what."

Final Words for Blues Fans

To readers of Blues Matters, he sends this message: "If you love the blues, I love you. Come see me if you get a chance. If not, buy my record and listen to me at home in the safety and privacy of your own home."

For further information see website:
www.charliemusselwhite.com

FAVOURITE BLUES ALBUMS

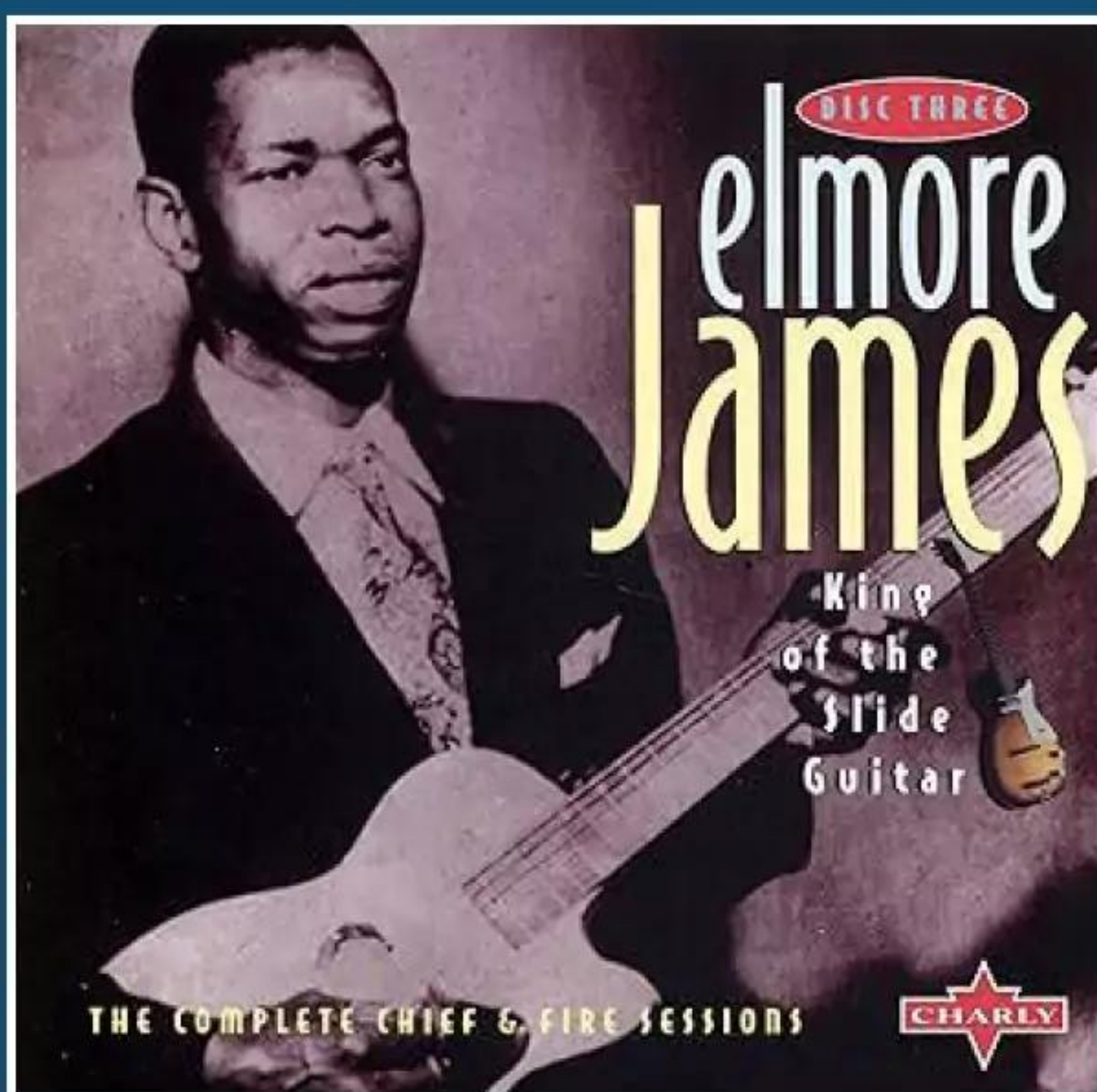
CELEBRATING 150 ISSUES OF BLUES MATTERS!

To mark our 150th issue, we asked artists, photographers, publicists and industry insiders from across the blues world to share their all-time favourite blues albums. The result is a rich and personal celebration of the records that shaped their musical journeys, defined their styles, and, in many cases, changed their lives. From slide guitar legends to gospel pioneers, from classic recordings to contemporary milestones, this list reflects the timeless pull of the blues.

DAVE DRURY

WRITER

Elmore James – King of the Slide Guitar



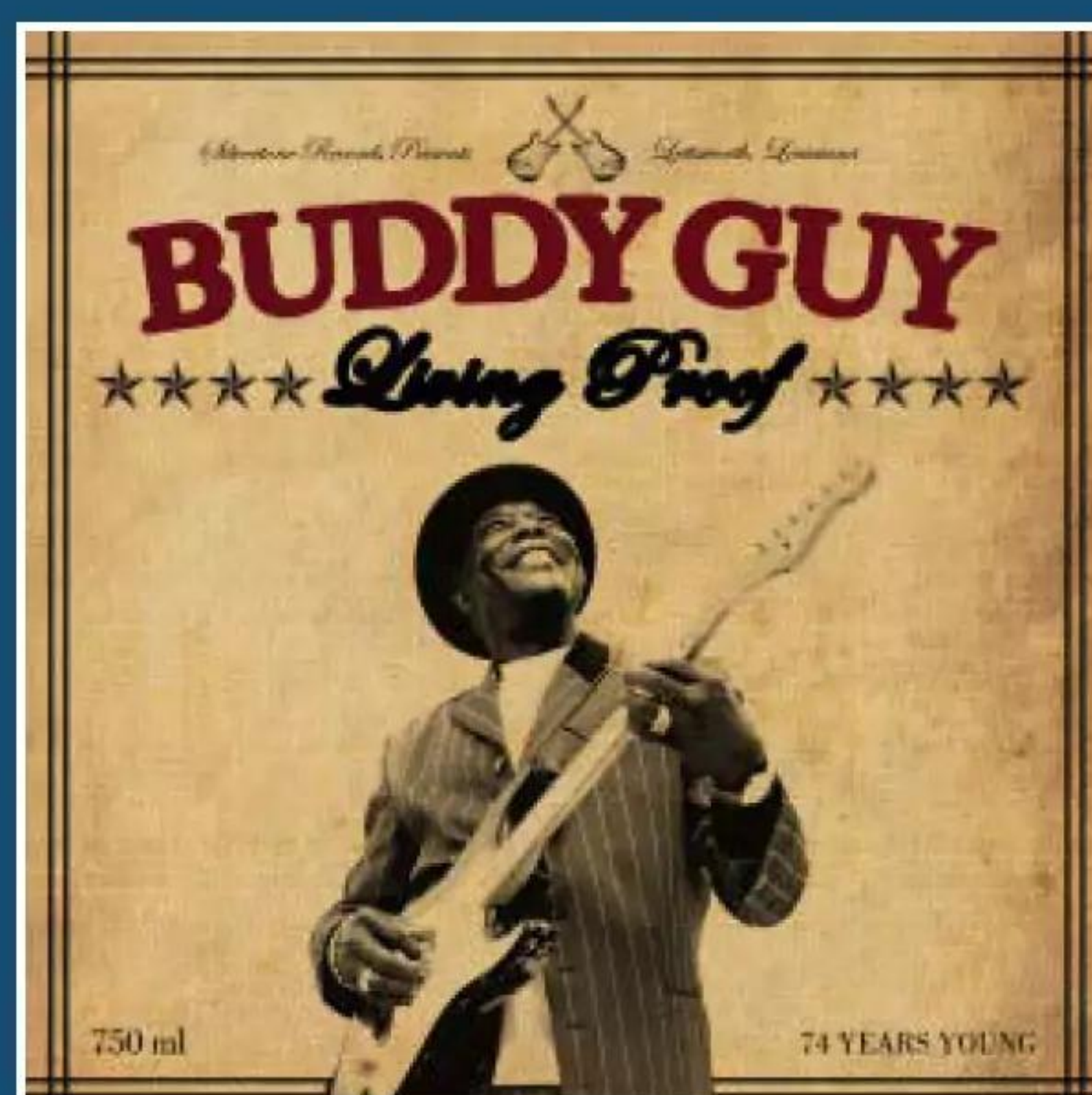
“Back in the early ‘50s, there were no blues albums released, so this is a compilation - but what an incredible collection! Dust My Broom is here, of course, along with Standing at the Crossroads, all delivered with Elmore’s throat-shredding vocals and searing slide guitar. Talk to Me Baby, Shake Your Moneymaker sound fabulous, and It Hurts Me Too and The Sky Is Crying still make the hairs on my neck stand up. Lesser-known gems like Bleeding Heart, Look On Yonder Wall, and a frantic Rollin’ and Tumblin’ also shine. Raw, primal and energetic, this album is a masterclass.”

BETSIE BROWN

BLIND RACCOON

Buddy Guy – Living Proof (2010)

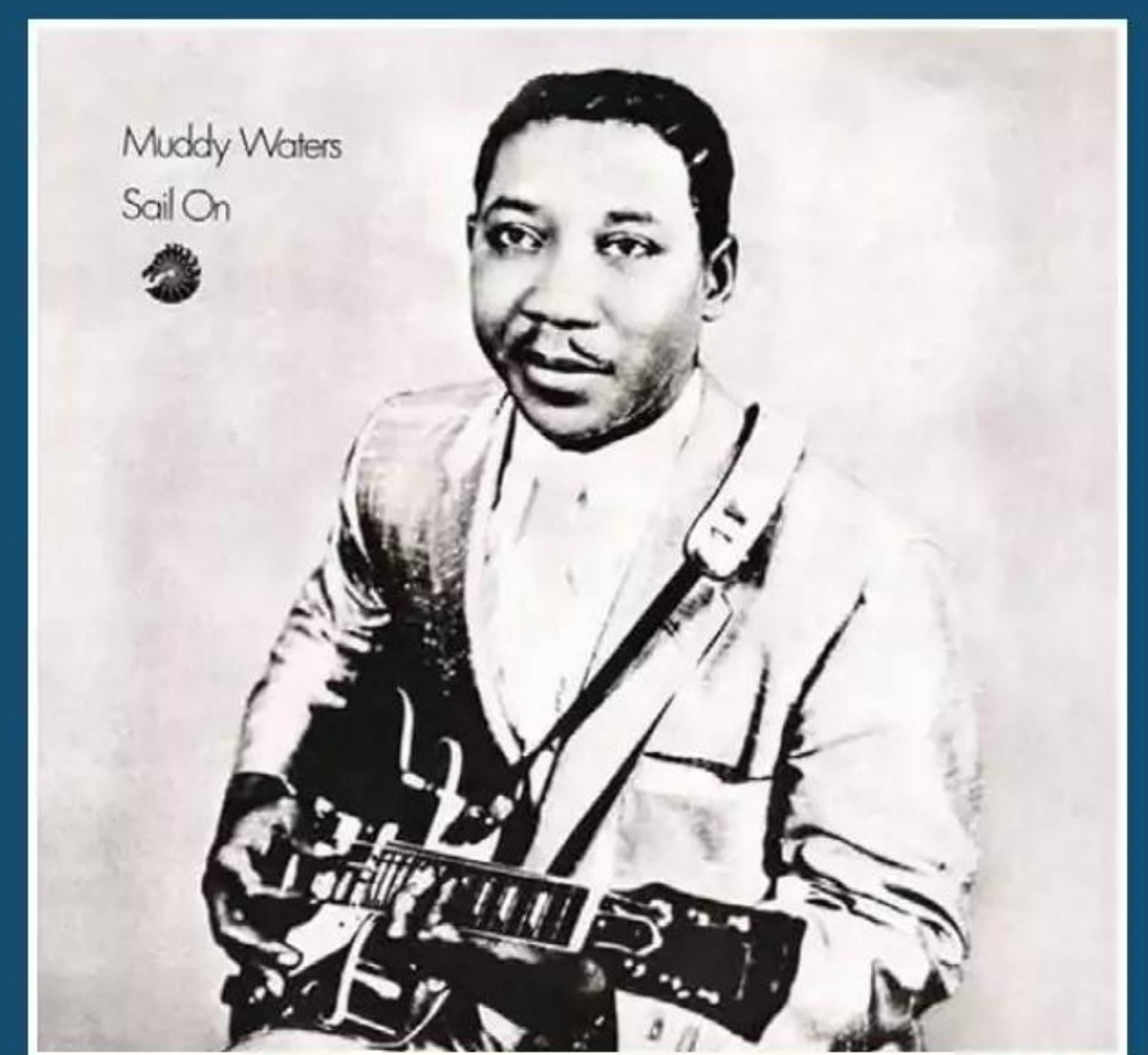
“Includes a powerful duet with B.B. King, Stay Around A Little Longer. It gives me goosebumps every time. Not only does it feature two global blues treasures, it also won the Grammy for Best Contemporary Blues Album in 2011. Personally, I’m proud that our company, Blind Raccoon, helped promote it - and every Buddy album since.”



MARC LIPKIN

ALLIGATOR RECORDS

Muddy Waters – Sail On (originally The Best of Muddy Waters)



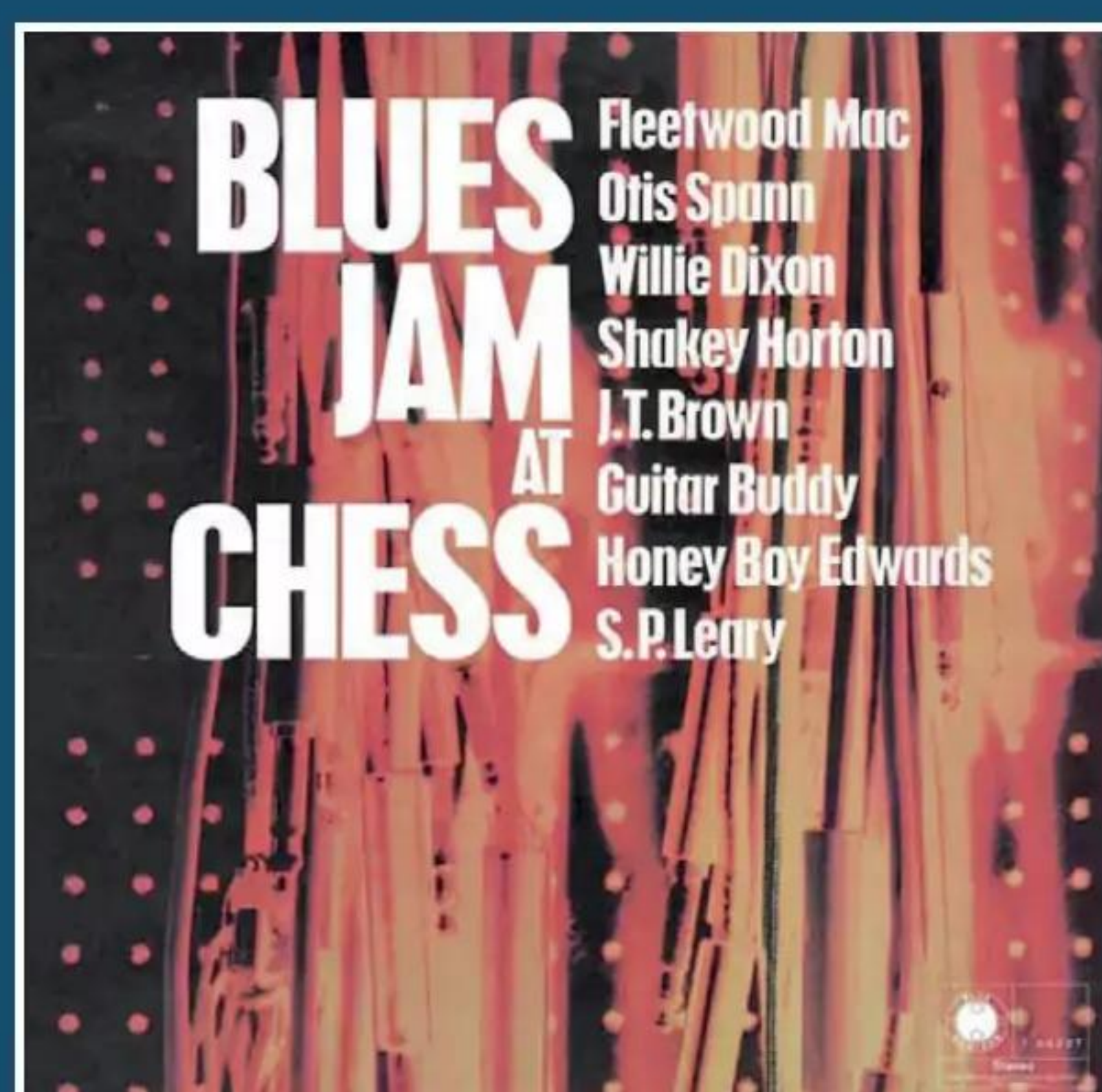
“As a 13-year-old in 1970s Chicago, this LP was my gateway to the blues. She Moves Me moved me. I Can’t Be Satisfied satisfied. It felt like the music was being channelled from another world. Watching Muddy live at Chicago Fest in 1980 sealed it - this album started everything for me.”

ARNIE GOODMAN

PHOTOGRAPHER

Fleetwood Mac – Blues Jam at Chess (1969)

“British blues meets Chicago royalty. Fleetwood Mac jamming with their heroes Otis Spann, Willie Dixon, Buddy Guy and others. Peter Green at his very best. Recorded at the legendary Chess Studio and produced by Mike Vernon - a landmark session.”



MEGAHN PARNELL

BYWATER CALL

Janis Joplin – Pearl

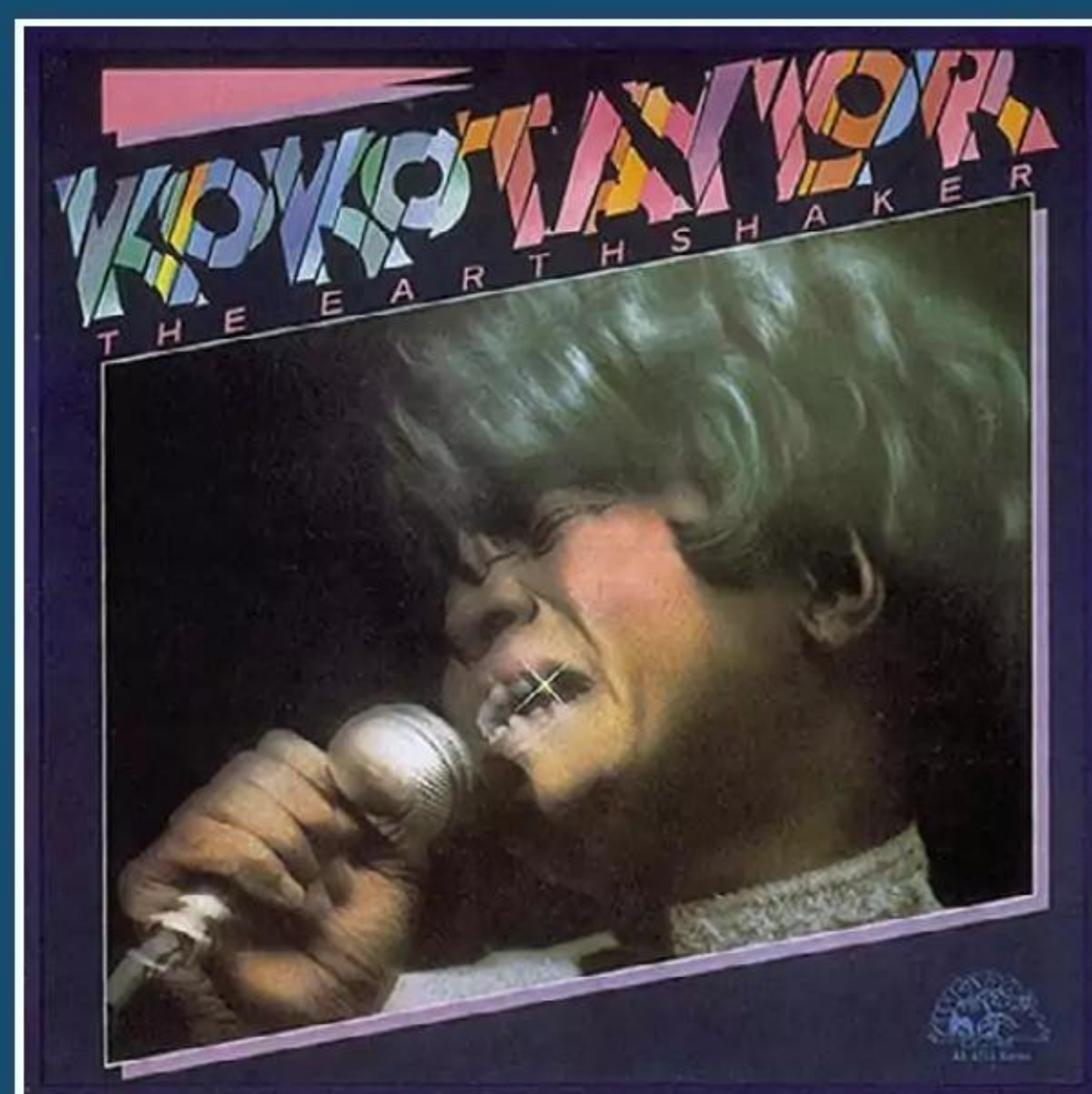


“Janis was the first female blues artist I remember hearing as a child. Her voice was raw, emotional and completely free. Cry Baby is incredible, and A Woman Left Lonely is heartbreakingly beautiful. She inspired me to find my own voice.”

ERJA LYYTINEN

ARTIST

Koko Taylor – Earthshaker (1978)

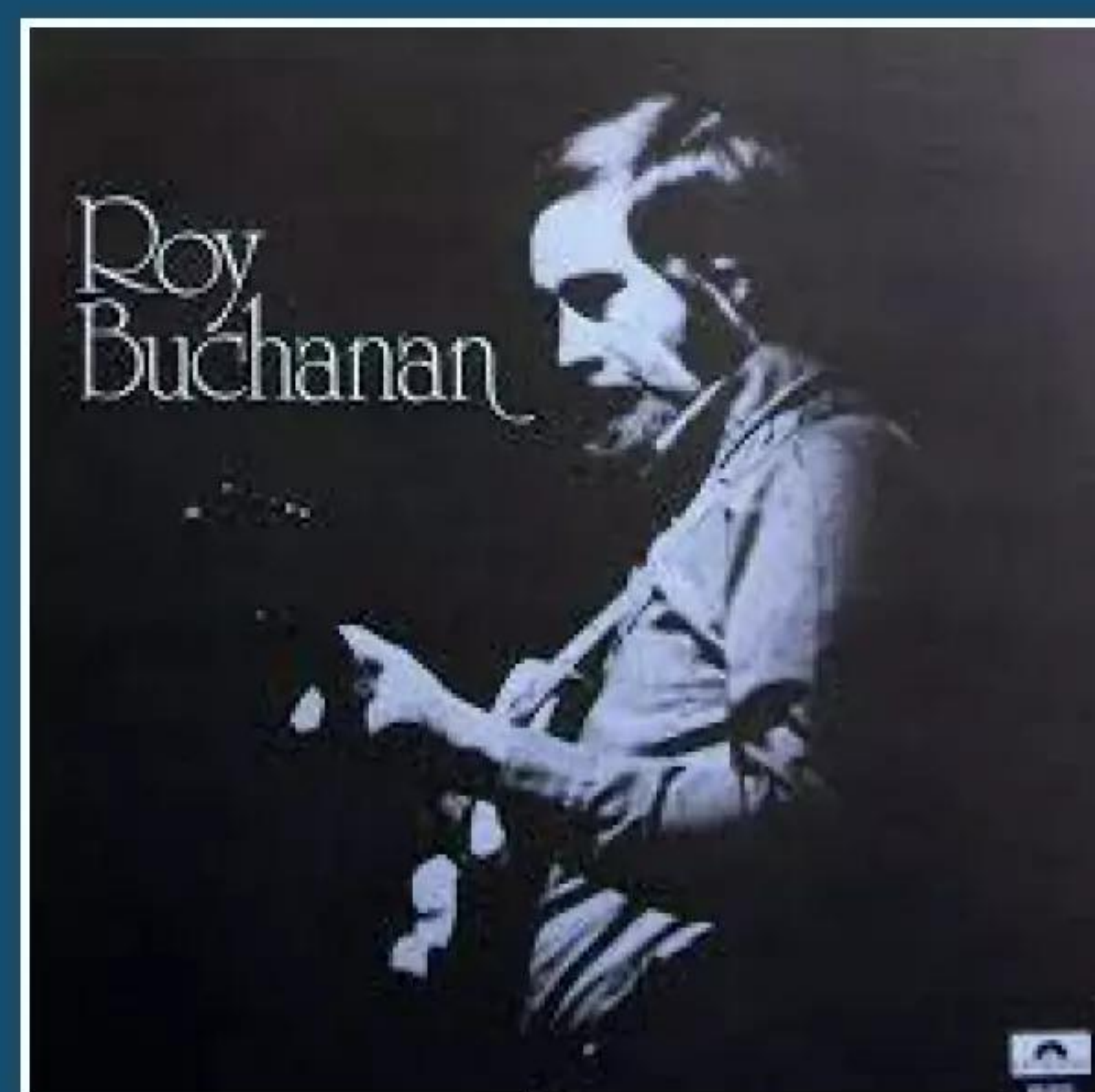


“I was 18 when I heard this - it blew

my mind. I’m A Woman is Koko’s take on Hoochie Coochie Man, played with just one chord. The whole album is Chicago blues at its finest. I even shared a festival stage with her in 2003 - she sounded exactly like she did on the record.”

ANDY HUGHES

WRITER



Roy Buchanan – Roy Buchanan

“This album started a lifelong love for Roy’s music. The Messiah Will Come Again was the first track I heard, and I bought the album the next day. His tone, feel and phrasing are second to none. A true giant of the blues guitar.”

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

WRITER

Savoy Brown Blues Band – Shake Down (1967)

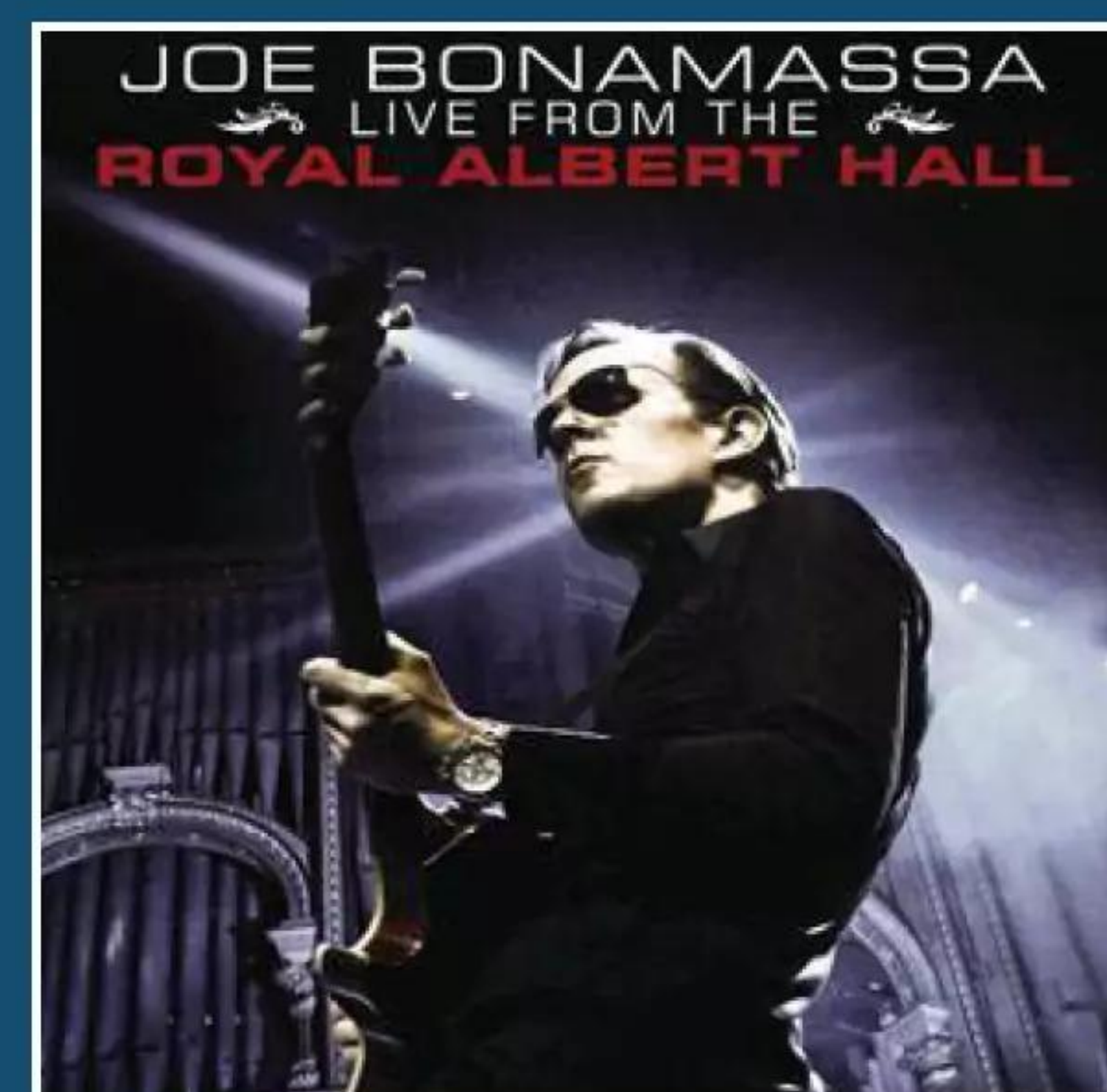


“I found this in a Woolworths bargain bin in the late ’60s and had never heard of the band or blues music. But after playing it once, I was hooked. It’s earthy, raw and

packed with great covers of blues standards - the album that started my blues journey.”

ZAC SCHULZE

ARTIST



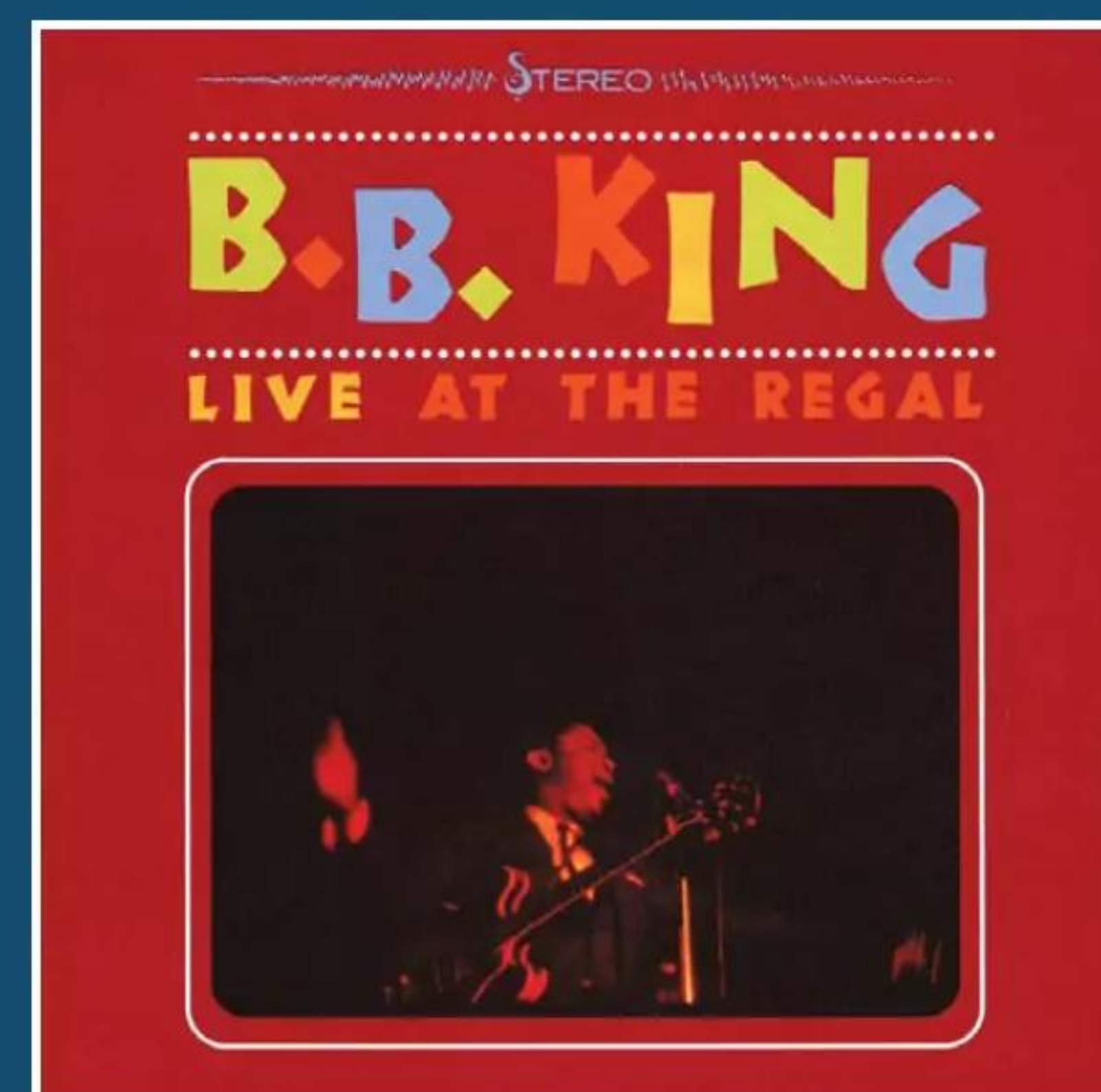
Joe Bonamassa – Live at the Royal Albert Hall (2009)

“I was 12 when I first heard this. It inspired me to pick up a guitar and dive into the blues. The playing, the tone, the song choices - it’s a masterclass in modern blues.”

JOE BONAMASSA

ARTIST

B.B. King – Live at the Regal (1965)



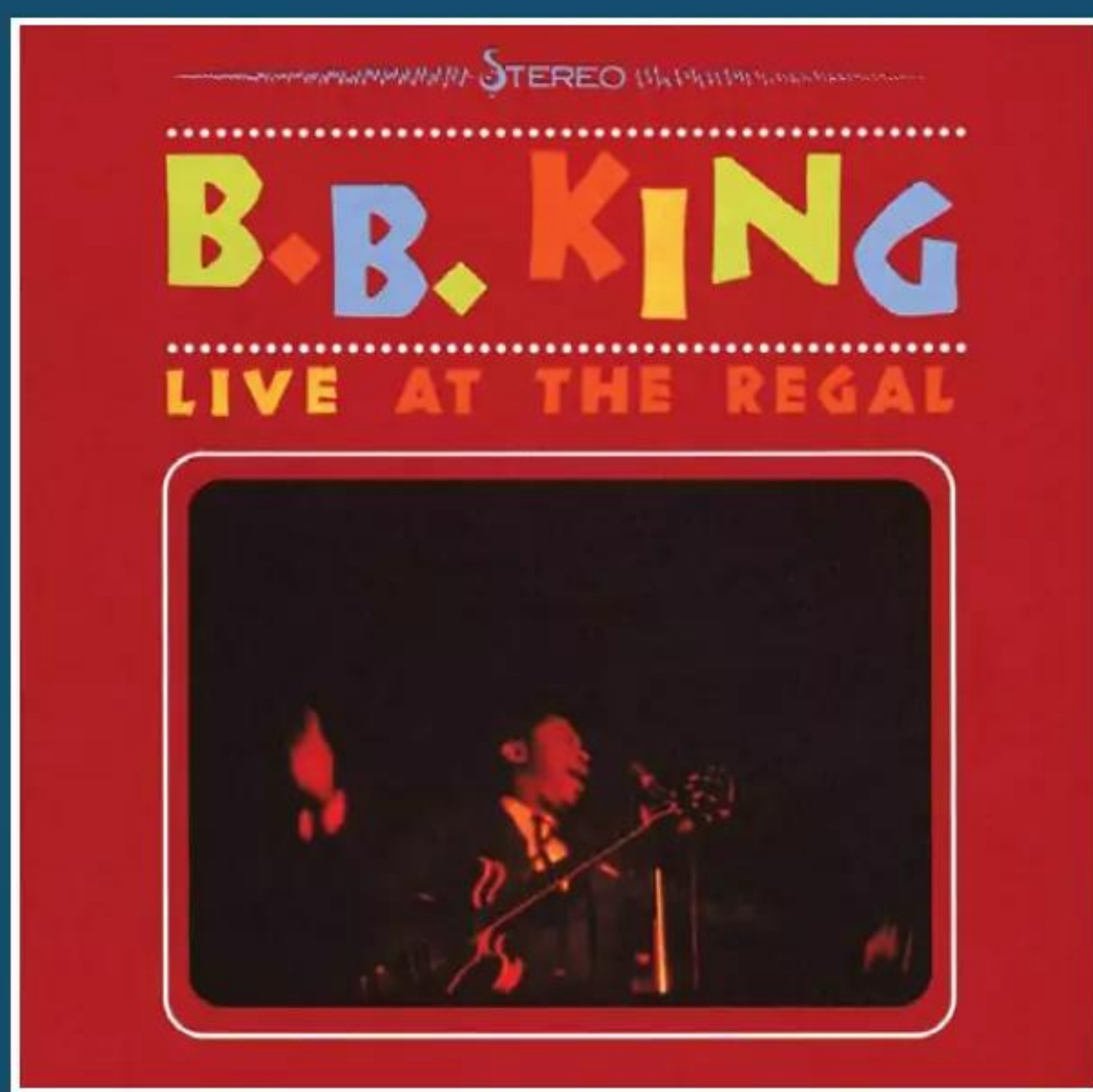
“The perfect live blues album. A hot band, no gimmicks, just great songs delivered by the best to ever do it. Folk legend says the Hammond organ broke, so Duke Jethro played piano throughout - and still nailed it.”

ALEX BENDER

PARKER BARROW

B.B. King – Live at the

Regal (1965)



“As a young guitarist, I asked my teacher how to play the blues. He handed me this record. I learned all the licks. B.B. wasn’t just a musician - he was an entertainer. This album makes you feel like you’re right there with him.”

LARRY MCCRAY

ARTIST

B.B. King - Take It Home (1979)



“BB was still free creatively - not yet burdened by legend status. Take It Home has a laid-back spirit and a great set of songs. The cover, with the boy peeking through the window at a guitar, reminded me of myself as a kid dreaming of music.”

LE-LA BAUM

THE DAMN TRUTH

Billie Holiday - Billie Holiday (1959)

“I had this on MiniDisc while living in chaotic India. It felt like stepping into velvet. Billie’s voice drips with soul and emotion. She was a rebel, a rule-breaker and a goddess. Her

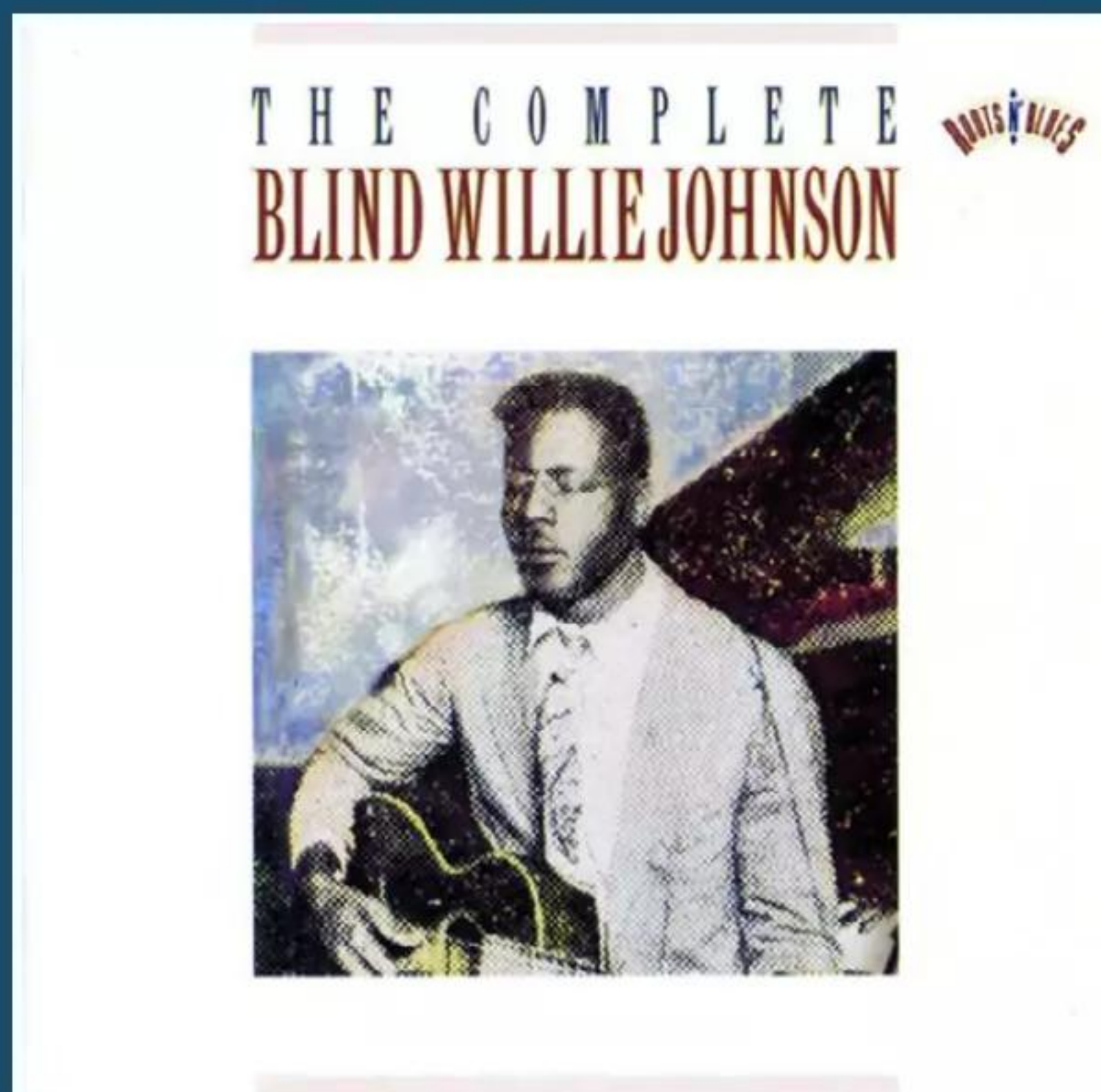


music still sounds ahead of its time.”

TROY REDFERN

ARTIST

Blind Willie Johnson - The Complete Collection (1993)



“His slide guitar work has never been surpassed. It’s raw, spiritual and deeply human. Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground is literally travelling through space on Voyager - a perfect symbol of its eternal power.”

ROBERT JON BURRISON

ROBERT JON & THE WRECK



Freddie King - Burglar (1974)

“Freddie was the funkiest of the Three Kings, and this album is his boldest. The grooves are deep, the guitar tone fierce. Steve Ferrone’s drumming brings it all together. It taught me blues could move, sweat and dance.”

MARCUS TRUMMER

ARTIST

Freddie King - Getting Ready... (1971)

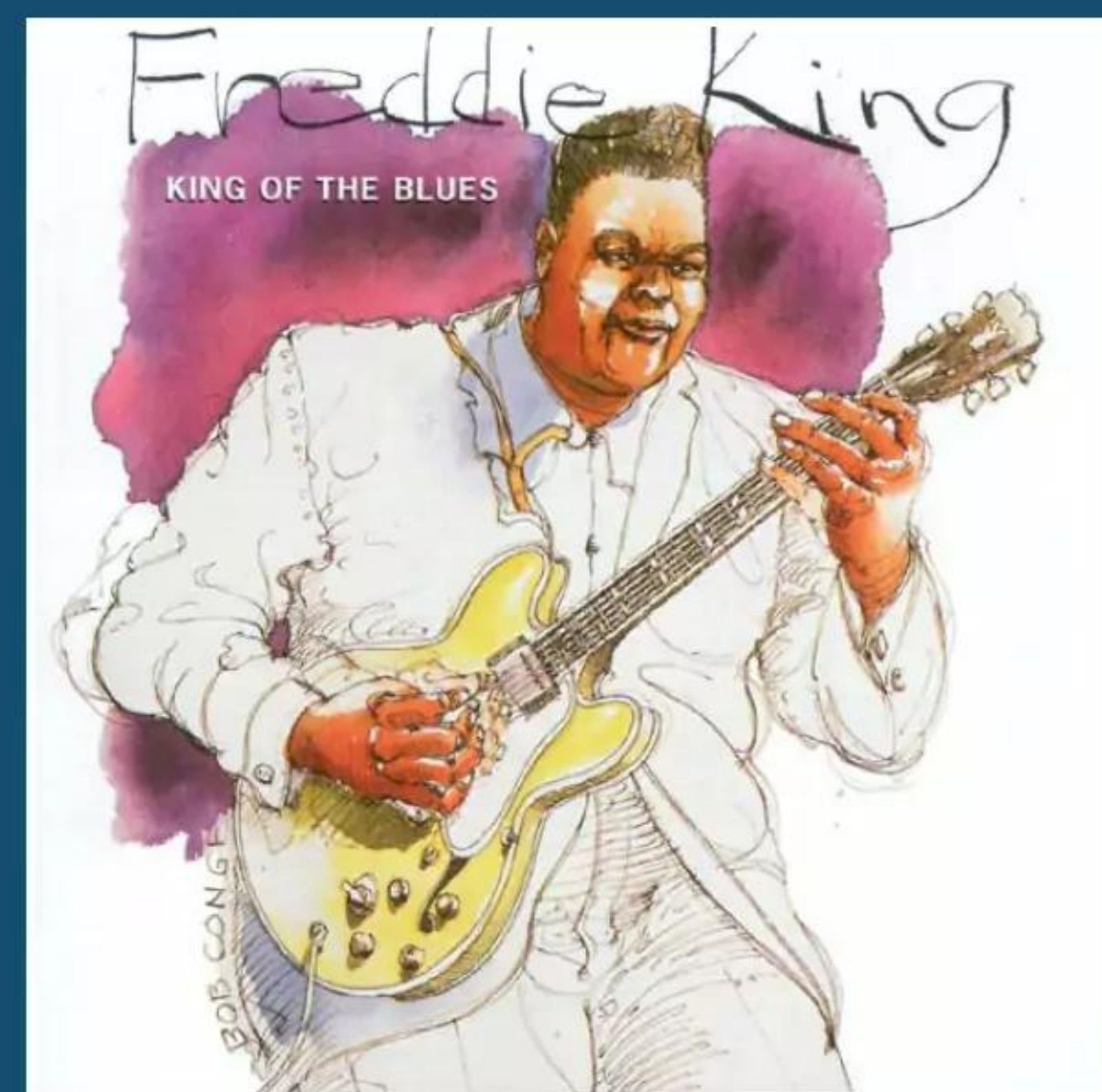


“This record played at our local jam night and I was instantly hooked. The vocals, the guitar tone - full of soul and swagger. A perfect mix of blues, rock and gospel vibes.”

SALLIE BENGTON

NOLA BLUE RECORDS

Freddie King - King of the Blues

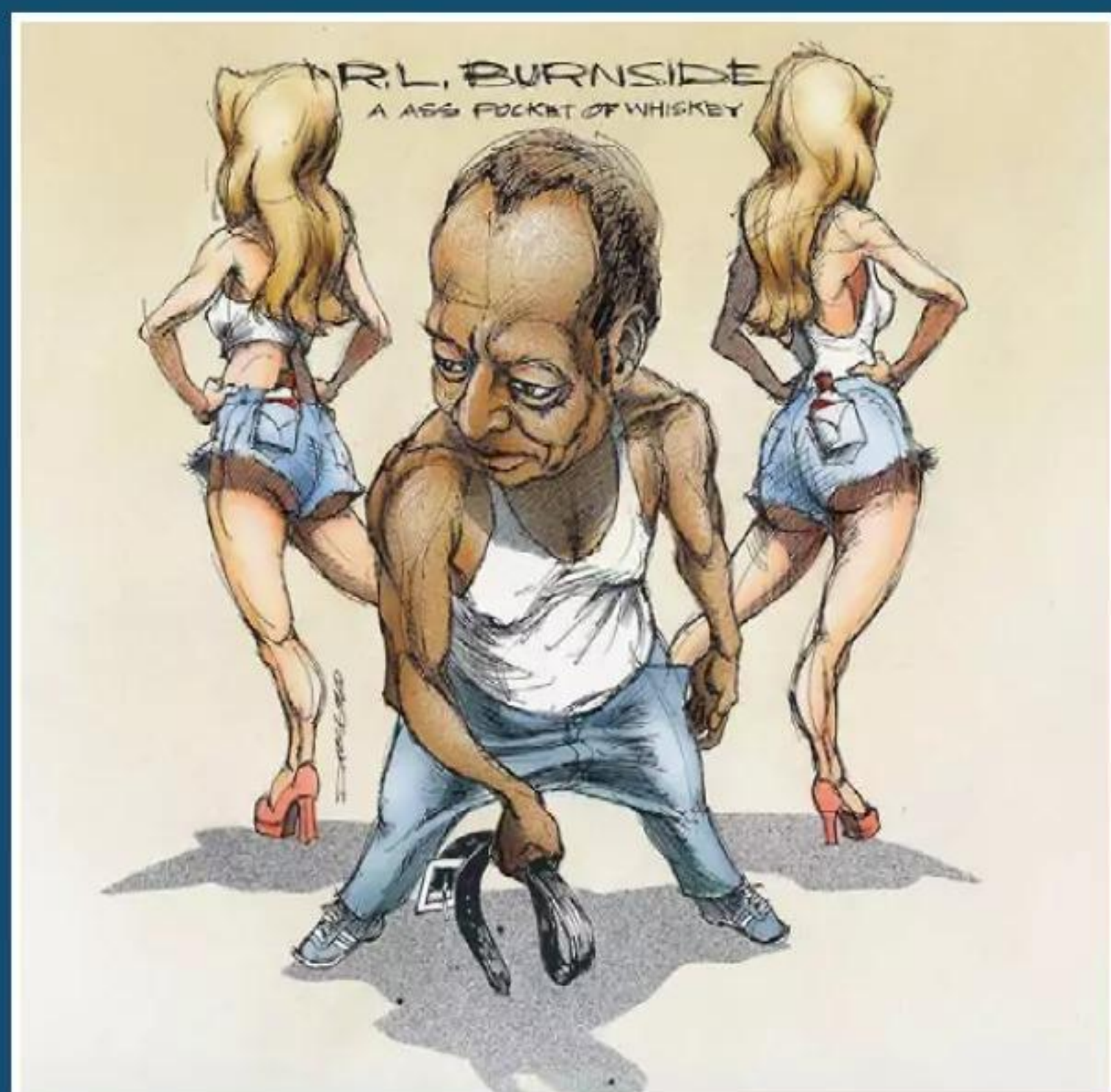


“My first blues album, and still the one that resonates the most. Freddie’s music led me deeper into the blues and even brought me into contact with his brother, Benny Turner. It changed my life.”

SAMANTHA FISH

ARTIST

R.L. Burnside – A Ass Pocket of Whiskey (1996)



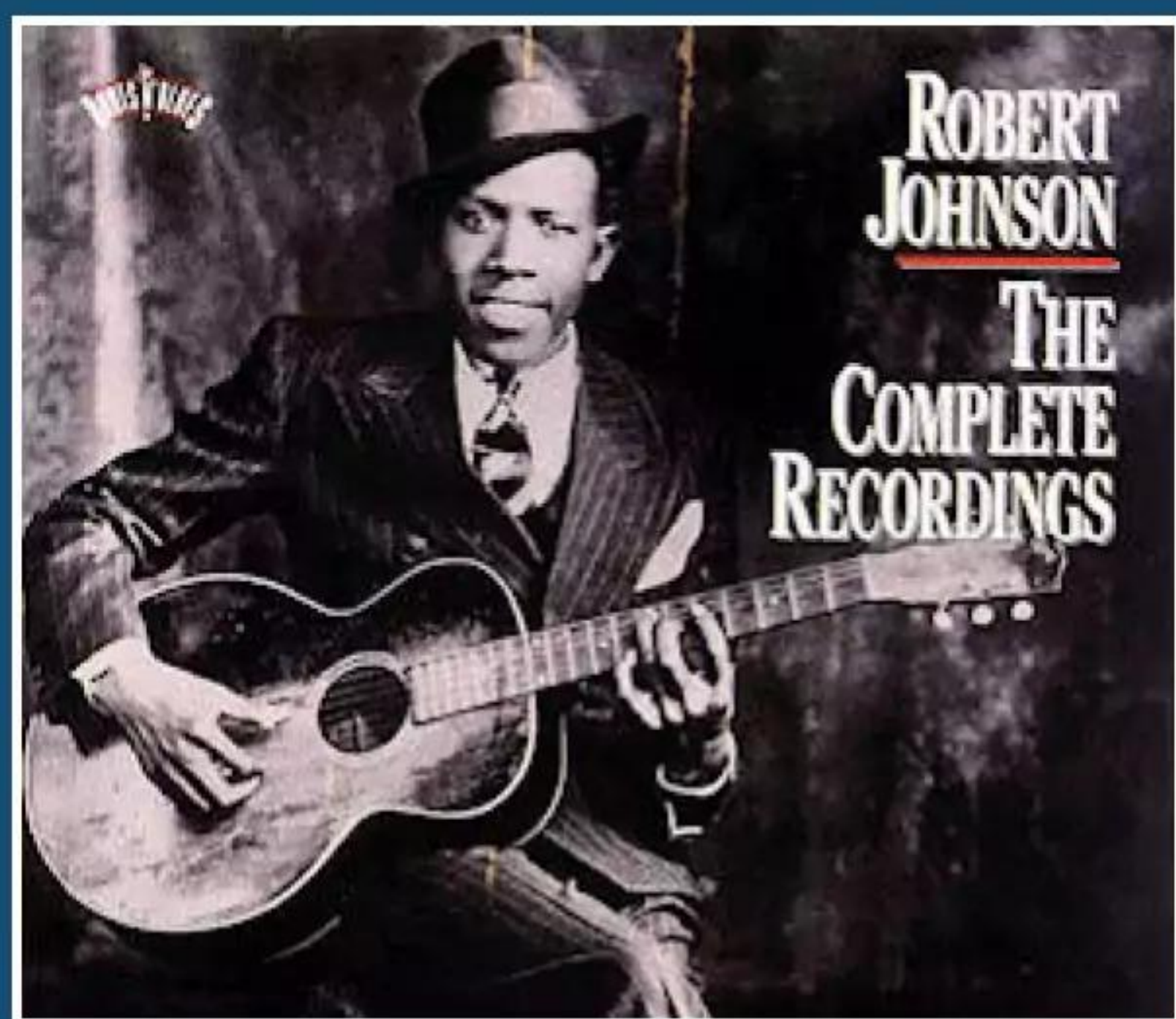
“Raw, punk-infused hill-country blues. Collaborating with Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Burnside made something wild and electric. All edges, no frills - this record opened up a whole new world of Mississippi blues for me.”

STEPHEN HARRISON

WRITER

Robert Johnson – King of the Delta Blues Singers (The Complete Recordings)

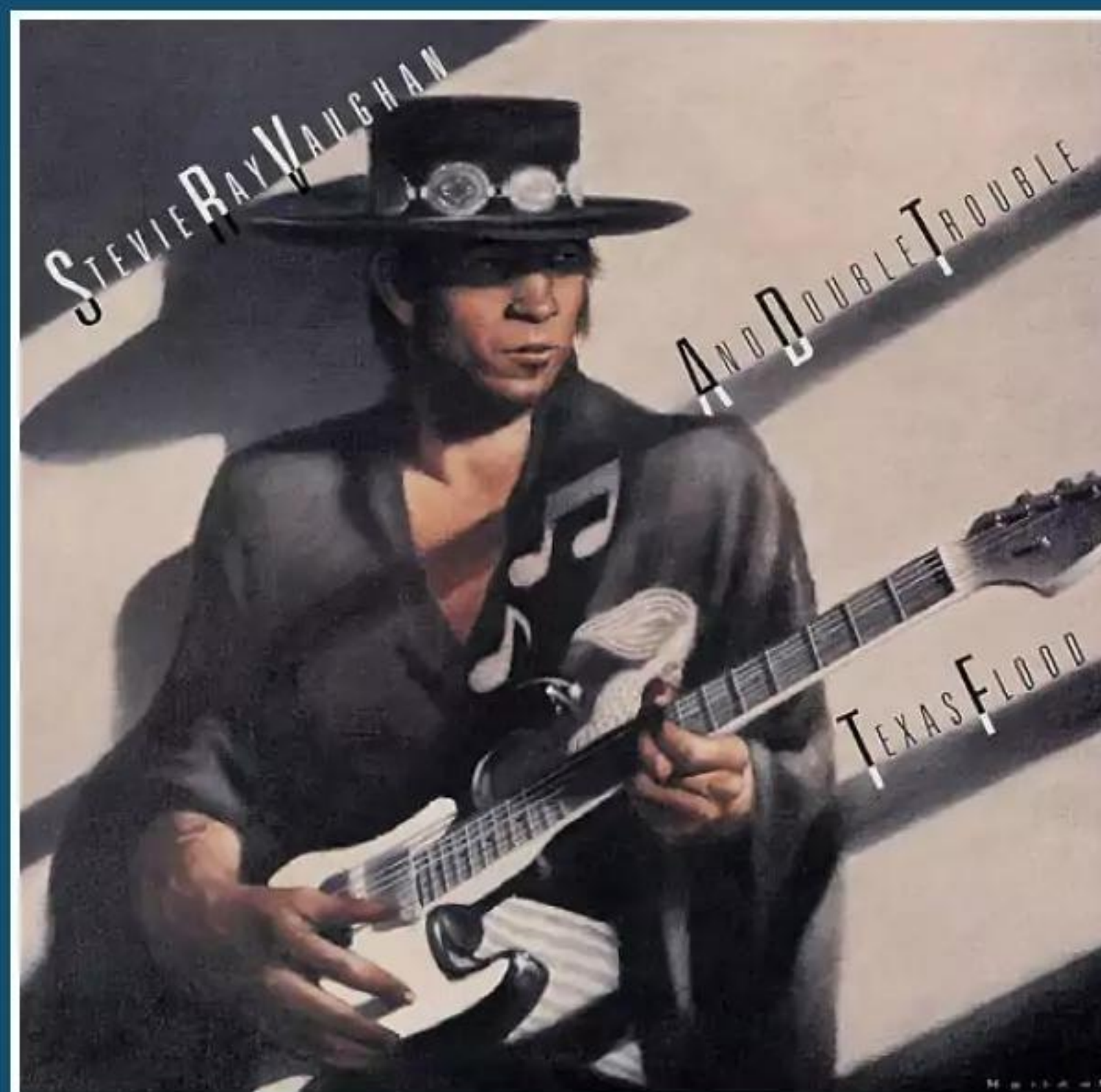
“A triple vinyl box set with every



track he ever recorded. Only 29 songs - but enough to change music forever. Did he sell his soul? Maybe. But the voice, the phrasing, the storytelling - there's nothing else like it.”

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR

ARTIST



Stevie Ray Vaughan – Texas Flood (1983)

“A masterpiece. It introduced me to the blues and shaped my entire musical outlook. Ten flawless tracks filled with emotion, intensity and brilliant guitar playing. It's easy to see why this record inspired a generation.”

ALLY VENABLE

ARTIST

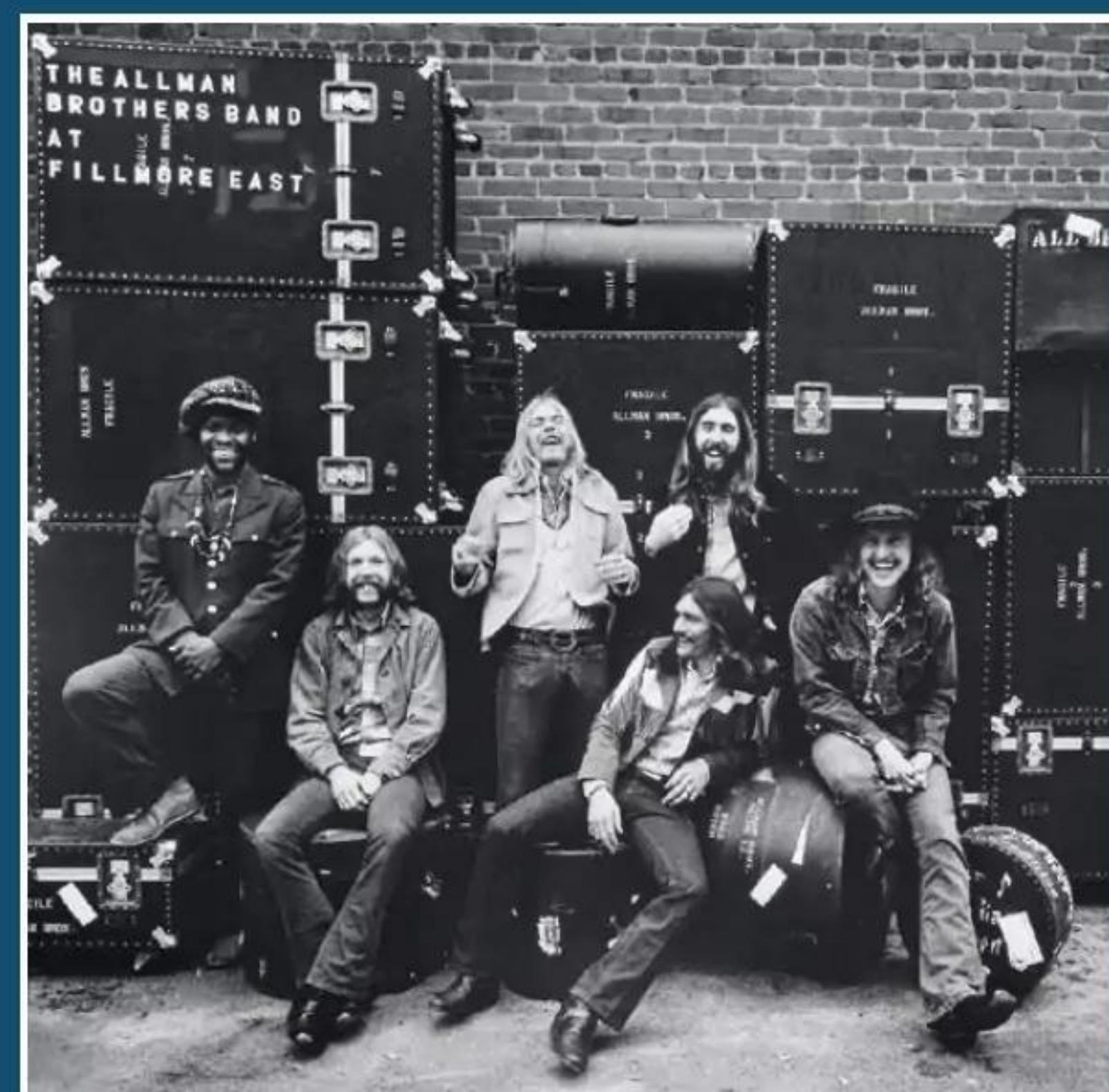
Stevie Ray Vaughan – Texas Flood (1983)

“I first heard it in my dad's truck on the way to school. The raw energy, the emotion, the connection - it hooked me instantly. Stevie's passion opened a whole world of blues for me. I hope my music can do the same for others.”

ROSS HAYES CITRULLO

THE COMMONERS

The Allman Brothers Band – Live at Fillmore East (1971)



“Pure improvisational magic. Duane's slide playing is unreal, the band's chemistry undeniable. This album reminds me what it means to play with soul, with fire, with connection. It's a masterclass in blues rock.”

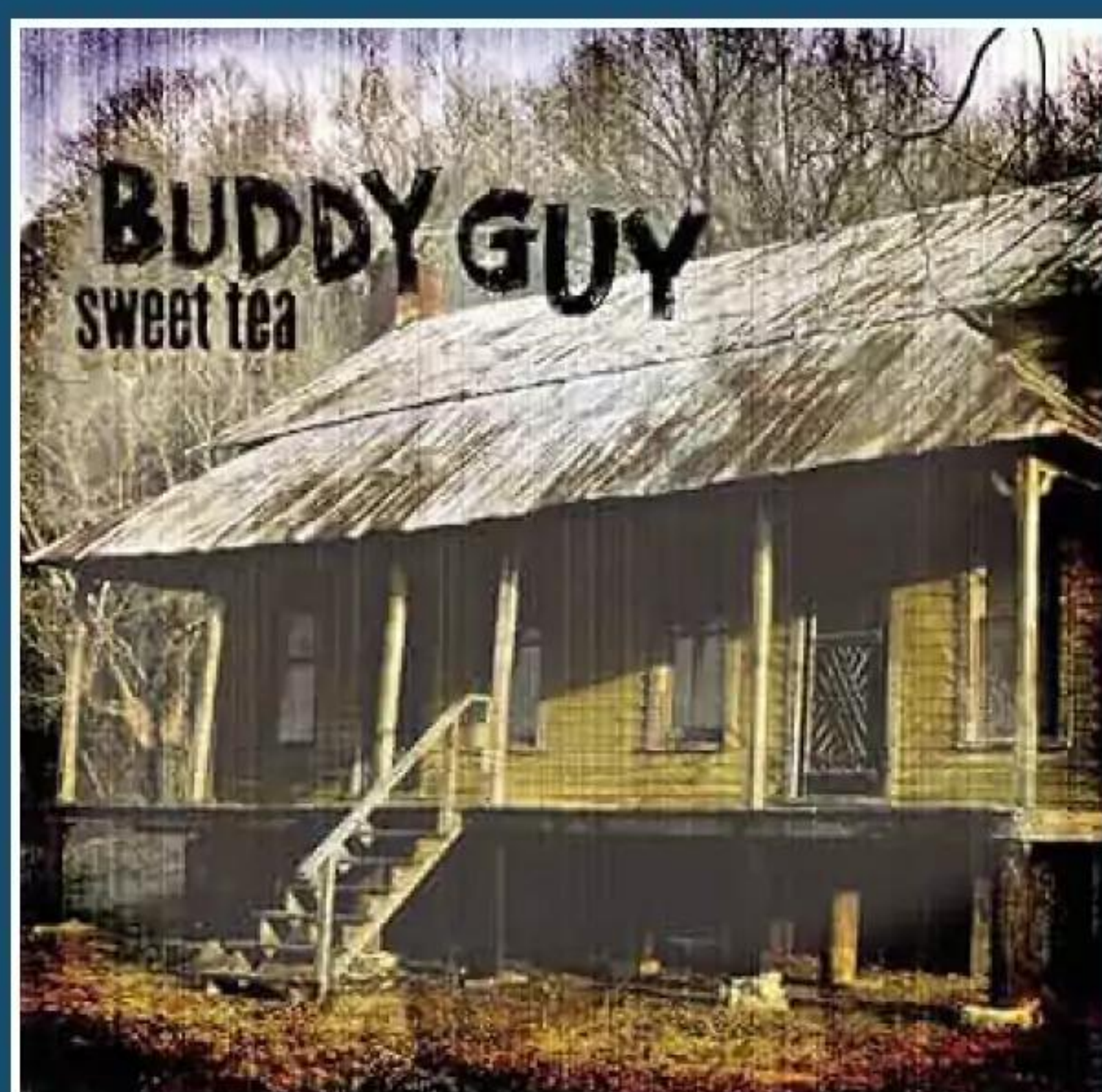
“Troy Redfern chose Blind Willie Johnson



ORIANTH

ARTIST

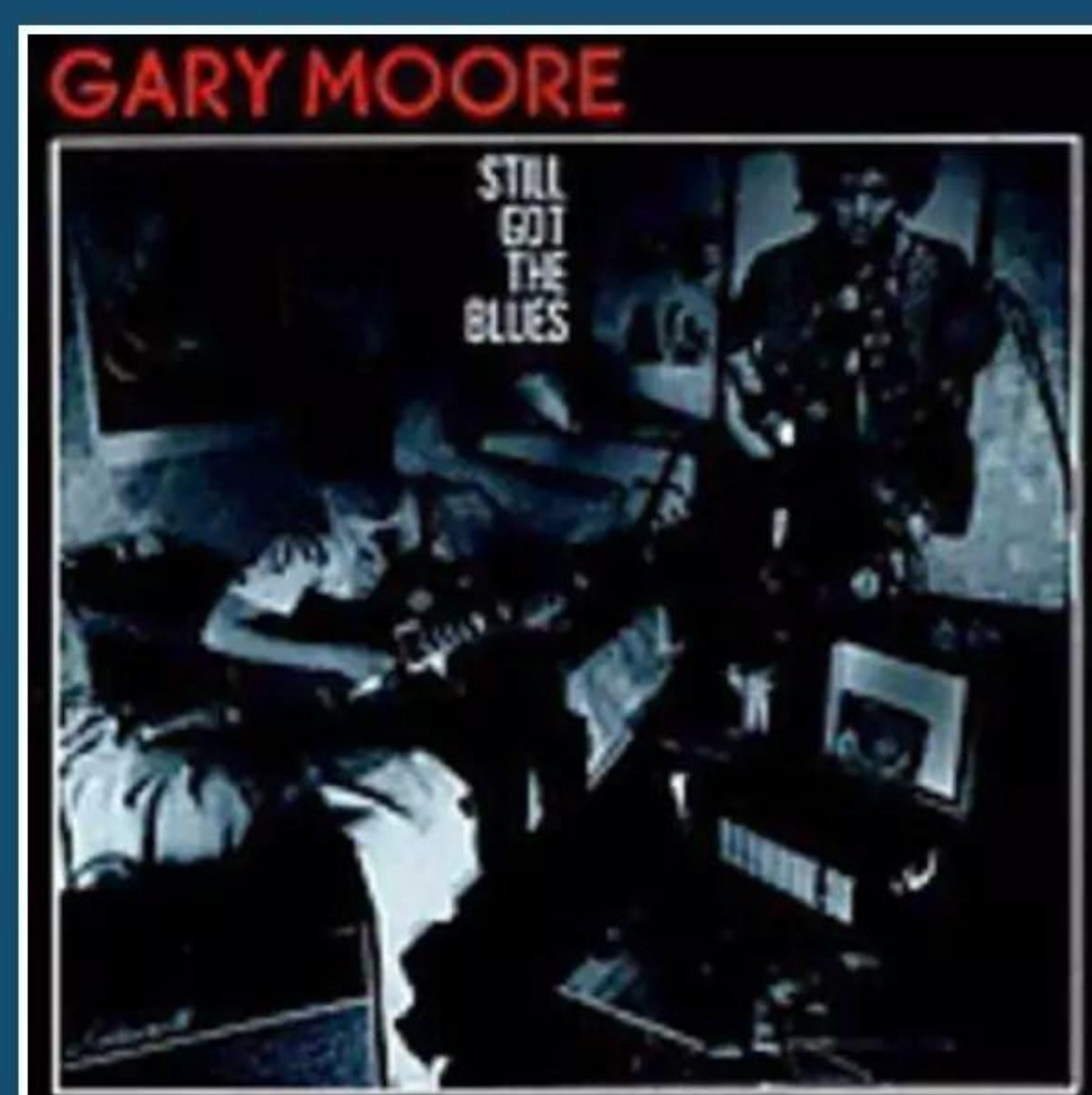
Buddy Guy – Sweet Tea



This record has such a vibe. A friend of mine told me to check it out when we were writing. I love the haunting melody and tones of 'Baby Please Don't Leave Me'. The whole record has a unique sound to it. 'Look What All You Got' – great groove and playing. I love Buddy's vocals. 'She's Got the Devil in Her' – love the phrasing and tones. This record is a great addition to your Blues collection!

KRIS BARRAS

ARTIST



Gary Moore – Still Got The Blues (2003)

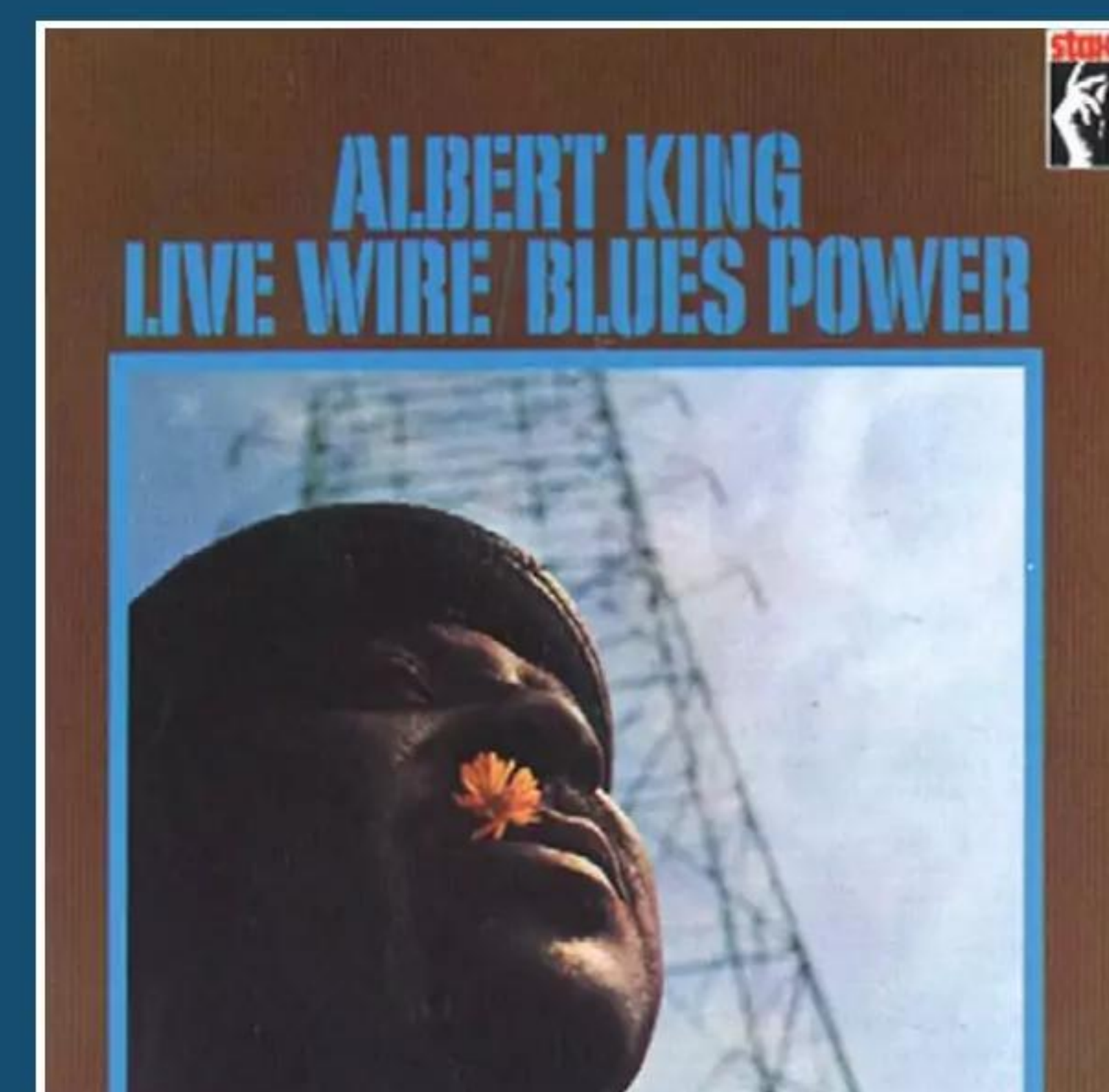
This record has such a vibe. A friend of mine told me to check it out when we were writing. I love the haunting melody and tones of 'Baby Please Don't Leave Me'. The whole record has a unique sound to it. 'Look What All You Got' – great groove

and playing. I love Buddy's vocals. 'She's Got the Devil in Her' – love the phrasing and tones. This record is a great addition to your Blues collection!

JARED JAMES NICHOLS

ARTIST

Albert King – Live Wire/Blues Power



This record has such a vibe. A friend of mine told me to check it out when we were writing. I love the haunting melody and tones of 'Baby Please Don't Leave Me'. The whole record has a unique sound to it. 'Look What All You Got' – great groove and playing. I love Buddy's vocals. 'She's Got the Devil in Her' – love the phrasing and tones. This record is a great addition to your Blues collection!

**“Joanne Shaw
Taylor picked Stevie
Ray Vaughan's album
– Texas Flood”**

Thank you for 150 Issues...
As we celebrate our 150th issue, we're reminded once again just how deep and diverse the blues runs - not just in the artists who play it, but in the lives it shapes. Whether it's a childhood memory, a life-changing moment, or the start of a lifelong passion, these albums continue to inspire. Here's to the records that made us, and to many more issues of celebrating the blues. Thank you for being part of the journey.



THE BEST DRESSED BLUES BAND



Now based in the Edinburgh area, The Best Dressed Blues Band deliver a gritty take on lesser-known blues classics alongside original material – all infused with that unmistakable Chicago blues edge.

The band first emerged from the Stirling music scene, and one of their earliest gigs was a season wrap party for the MacRobert Arts Centre pantomime at Stirling University. Headlining that show was none other than Craig Ferguson (then performing as Bing Hitler), who famously called them “the best dressed blues band I’ve ever heard.” The name stuck – and while Ferguson went on to Hollywood success with *The Late Late Show*, the band stayed true to their roots, building a reputation gig by gig across Scotland.

After a hiatus prompted by life changes and relocations, the group reformed just before the pandemic. The current lineup features two founding members – Chili on drums and Peter on lead vocals and slide guitar – now joined by seasoned players: Brian “The King Bee” on harmonica, Pedro on bass, and Lawrie on lead guitar. This line-up has remained rock solid since 2021.

Peter reflects: “We’ve all been huge fans of Chicago blues since we were young. Back in the pre-internet days, it’s amazing how accessible those records were in UK shops – and how much they shaped bands like the Rolling Stones”.

Today, The Best Dressed Blues Band are regular fixtures across Scotland and the North East of England, with growing festival appearances including the Darlington R’n’B Festival and a return to the Callander Jazz and Blues Festival. Their sound – a potent mix of blistering lead guitar, soulful slide, and wailing harmonica – channels the raw, unpolished energy of early electric blues. It may sound simple, but as any musician knows, getting it right takes real finesse.

The band are planning to head into the studio in the coming year. In the meantime, you can catch them live – or sample their sound online

TOM RHODES



Hailing from a small village in Aberdeenshire, 16-year-old guitarist Tom Rhodes is fast becoming one of the most exciting young talents on the UK blues scene.

Blues Matters caught up with Tom after his standout performance at the Orkney Blues Festival in April, where he lit up the main stage with a blend of original material and blues classics. “I love all things blues, and I love performing,” says Tom. “The festival was amazing – so many incredible musicians. Getting a main stage slot was a real privilege, and when Paolo Fuschi invited me up to jam with him, it was just unreal. That’s a night I’ll never forget!”

A familiar face at BrewDog gigs, local weddings, and jam nights at Aberdeen’s iconic Blue Lamp, Tom has been developing his sound and reputation since picking up a guitar at age eight. “My family’s always supported me,” he explains. “My grandad was in a Dixieland jazz band, and I grew up surrounded by all sorts – Led Zeppelin, Nina Simone, you name it. That variety has definitely shaped the way I play.”

Tom first grabbed national attention back in 2019, when Cerys Matthews gave him a surprise shout-out on her BBC Radio 2 Blues Show. “I couldn’t believe it,” he recalls. “I used to listen every Monday night. Hearing my name on the radio at 11 years old was surreal!”

Influenced by the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Albert King, and Derek Trucks, Tom brings a fresh, expressive edge to the blues. His playing is soulful, dynamic, and bursting with personality – a style that’s already turning heads far beyond his hometown. Last September, he landed a support slot with the Andy Taylor Band at The Blue Lamp – another milestone in a journey that’s only just beginning.

At just 16, Tom Rhodes is already making waves. The blues is in safe hands – and its future is looking bright.

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THE COMMONERS

SPRING TOUR 2025

MAY 14 STUTTGART, DE IM WIZEMANN*
MAY 15 FRANKFURT, DE DAS BETT*
MAY 16 COLOGNE, DE KANTINE KÖLN*
MAY 17 MÜNSTER, DE SPUTNIKHALLE MÜNSTER*
MAY 18 HAMBURG, DE ÜBEL UND GEFÄHRLICH*
MAY 20 CHAMBERY, FR BRIN DE ZINC
MAY 23 BEAUMONT-EN-VÉRON, FR LE TEMPS DES CRISES
MAY 24 BULLY LES MINES BULLY ON ROCKS MUSIC FESTIVAL
MAY 25 BATHMEN, NL SKINNY LIZARD MUSIC FESTIVAL 2025
MAY 28 FAVERSHAM, UK THE OLD BREWERY STORE
MAY 29 SOUTHAMPTON, UK THE JOINERS
MAY 30 LINCOLNSHIRE, UK CALL OF THE WILD FESTIVAL 2025
MAY 31 CHESTER, UK THE LIVE ROOMS
JUNE 1 NEWCASTLE, UK THE CLUNY
JUNE 3 BARLO, NETHERLANDS DE LOODS
JUNE 5 SÖLVESBORG, SWEDEN SWEDEN ROCK FESTIVAL
JUNE 21 BOURNEMOUTH, UK LOVEROCKS FESTIVAL
JUNE 22 HERTFORDSHIRE, UK SIGN OF THE TIMES

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17.06 GLASGOW
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with special guest **Ashley Sherlock**

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20.07 / MAID OF STONE MUSIC FESTIVAL / MAIDSTONE, KENT, ENGLAND

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20.11 SOUTHEND CHINNERY'S
21.11 GLOUCESTER GUILDHALL
22.11 NEWCASTLE ANARCHY BREW
23.11 GLASGOW ORAN MOR

25.11 LEEDS BRUDENELL
26.11 MANCHESTER BAND ON THE WALL
27.11 PLANET ROCK STOCK
28.11 SOUTHAMPTON THE BROOK

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17.10 CHESTERFIELD REAL TIME LIVE
18.10 LONDON CAMDEN UNDERWORLD
19.10 STOWMARKET JOHN PEEL CENTRE
22.10 SHOREHAM ROPETACKLE
23.10 CARDIFF THE GLOBE
24.10 LEEK FOXLOWE ARTS
25.10 GLOUCESTER GUILDHALL
26.10 NORWICH WATERFRONT STUDIO
29.10 GRIMSBY DOCKS ACADEMY

30.10 HUDDERSFIELD PARISH
31.10 BIRMINGHAM CASTLE & FALCON
01.11 STOCKTON GEORGIAN THEATRE
02.11 CARLISLE OLD FIRE STATION
04.11 GLASGOW ORAN MOR
05.11 EDINBURGH LA BELLE ANGELE
06.11 YORK CRESCENT
07.11 BLACKPOOL WATERLOO
08.11 SOUTHAMPTON SUBURBIA
09.11 TAVISTOCK WHARF

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THU 13 LEEK FOXLOWE ARTS
FRI 14 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
SAT 15 SHEFFIELD CORPORATION
SUN 16 GLASGOW MAC ARTS
MON 17 GLASGOW ORAN MOR

TUE 18 NEWCASTLE THE CLUNY
WED 19 LEEDS BRUDENELL
THU 20 BEDFORD ESQUIRES
FRI 21 LONDON UNDERWORLD
SAT 22 BRIDGWATER COBBLESTONES
SUN 23 CARDIFF CLOVE

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24/9 - VOODOO ROOMS - EDINBURGH
25/9 - HALLE ST PETERS - MANCHESTER
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27/9 - BRISTOL BEACON - BRISTOL
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THE BIG BLUES CHART

THE TOP 50 BLUES ALBUMS

POS	ARTIST	ALBUM	LABEL
#1	BOBBY RUSH & KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD	YOUNG FASHIONED WAYS	DEEP RUSH
#2	JANIVA MAGNESS	BACK FOR ME	BLUE ELAN
#3	POPA CHUBBY	I LOVE FREDDIE KING	GULF COAST RECORDS
#4	SOUTHERN AVENUE	FAMILY	ALLIGATOR RECORDS
#5	TOMMY CASTRO AND THE PAINKILLERS	CLOSER TO THE BONE	ALLIGATOR RECORDS
#6	JOHN PRIMER	GROWN IN MISSISSIPPI	BLUES HOUSE
#7	ANDREW DUNCANSON	CALIFORNIA TRAP	RUN IT BACK RECORDS
#8	TONY HOLIDAY	KEEP YOUR HEAD UP	FORTY BELOW RECORDS
#9	ALLY VENABLE	MONEY & POWER	RUF RECORDS
#10	JIMMY VIVINO	GONNA BE 2 OF THOSE DAYS	GULF COAST RECORDS
#11	BOB CORRITORE	DOIN' THE SHOUT!	VIZZTONE
#12	KID RAMOS	STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING	NOLA BLUE
#13	CAROLYN WONDERLAND	TRUTH IS	ALLIGATOR RECORDS
#14	SEAN CHAMBERS	LIVE FROM DARYL'S HOUSE CLUB	QUARTO VALLEY RECORDS
#15	MAX HIGHTOWER	NOTHIN' BUT THE TRUTH	MOMOJO
#16	WILL WILDE	BLUES IS STILL ALIVE	VIZZTONE
#17	GA-20	EP VOL 2	COLEMINE
#18	JENNIFER LYN & THE GROOVE REVIVAL	RETROGRADE	J AND R COLLECTIVE
#19	THE BOB LANZA BLUES BAND	BREADMAN'S BLUES	MOMOJO RECORDS
#20	JOHNNY RAWLS	MAKE THEM DANCE	CATFOOD
#21	MIKE DANGEROUX	EMPTY CHAIR	RD RECORDS
#22	EDDIE 9V	SARATOGA	RUF RECORDS
#23	HEAVYDRUNK & WATERMELON SLIM	BLUESLAND THEME PARK	HEAVYDRUNK RECORDS
#24	RONNIE BAKER BROOKS	BLUES IN MY DNA	ALLIGATOR RECORDS
#25	SHARI PUORTO	HOLD ON	LITTLE LIGHTNING PRODUCTIONS
#26	DADDY MACK BLUES BAND	DOCTOR'S ORDERS	INSIDE SOUNDS
#27	HUGHES TAYLOR	ROASTED	THE BENT NOTE
#28	THE REVEREND PEYTON'S BIG DAMN BAND	HONEYSUCKLE	FAMILY OWNED RECORDS
#29	JOHNNY IGUANA	AT DELMARK	DELMARK RECORDS
#30	FRANK BEY	PEACE	NOLA BLUE
#31	MITCH RYDER	WITH LOVE	RUF
#32	MARK 'MULEMAN' MASSEY	BEEN A LONG TIME	MULETONE
#33	MATT "THE RATTLESNAKE" LESCH	BLUES CUT LIKE GLASS	SELF
#34	DUDLEY TAFT	THE SPEED OF LIFE	AMERICAN BLUES ARTIST GROUP
#35	DAVIS COEN	LIVE AT PROUD LARRY'S	SOUNDVIEW
#36	CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE	LOOK OUT HIGHWAY	FORTY BELOW RECORDS
#37	BIG AL AND THE HEAVYWEIGHTS	BLUES POWER	VIZZTONE
#38	CRYSTAL SHAWANDA	SING PRETTY BLUES	NEW SUN RECORDS
#39	BIG DAVE & THE DUTCHMEN	BIG DAVE & THE DUTCHMEN	NAKED
#40	JON CLEARY	THE BYWATER SESSIONS	FHQ RECORDS
#41	SHEMEKIA COPELAND	BLAME IT ON EVE	ALLIGATOR
#42	STEVE HOWELL & THE MIGHTY MEN	YEAH MAN	OUT OF THE PAST MUSIC
#43	ED ALSTROM	FLEE THOUGH NONE PURSUE	HAYWIRE
#44	CHRISTOPHER WYZE & THE TELLERS	LIVE IN CLARKSDALE	BIG RADIO RECORDS
#45	THE ANTHONY PAULE SOUL ORCHESTRA	WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR	BLUE DOT
#46	CHRIS CAIN	GOOD INTENTIONS GONE BAD	ALLIGATOR
#47	SUNNY BLEAU AND THE MOONS	PASSION & REGRETS	ENDLESS BLUES RECORDS
#48	OLLEE OWENS	NOWHERE TO HIDE	S/R
#49	BRANDON SANTINI	WHICH WAY DO WE GO	MOMOJO RECORDS
#50	SAMANTHA FISH	PAPER DOLL	ROUNDER RECORDS

The Illustrated Blues Of Brian Kramer

JIMI!



That's right, Jimi. Come on, there isn't a guitar player or Blues artist that came to be in the last 30 or so years that hasn't crawled inside of Electric Ladyland and didn't want to live there for days, weeks, months...

Future Blues was what they coined it in his advent in the 60's, but it's just good ol' heartfelt Blues. Jimi learned for the best of them, like all of us; Muddy, B.B, Lightnin', John Lee, and then some.

Buddy Guy talked often of Jimi and their personal connection and it's clear where Jimi got some of his expression of freedom on the Strat.

Stevie Ray... well, he reclaimed Voodoo Chile like nobody

else, and certainly a whole lot of "else's" have tried.

If Muddy electrified the Blues and made it accessible on a whole new level, then Jimi took that level and connected it with & beyond the "STRAT-osphere" (pun very much intended...).

So, I'm showcasing my most recent Jimi tribute illustration. A legend I continually come back to and study, both with the line and with the strings.

Thank goodness he left us enough with his genius to keep us guessing for a long, long time!

"See you in the next world, don't be late!"



22-27 JULY
2025



TEXAS TWANG AND BLUES SOUL

CAROLYN WONDERLAND

Carolyn Wonderland's accent gives away her Texas roots the moment she speaks. When Blues Matters caught up with her ahead of her new album release, it was clear this seasoned guitarist and vocalist had stories to tell - and plenty of soul behind the sound.

✍ Andy Hughes 📷 Supplied

The Long Road, and the Lessons Learned

A quick listen to Carolyn's work reveals a guitarist who knows her fretboard and a singer with a smoky, expressive voice that seems built for the blues. But is that hard-lived voice the result of an equally hard-lived life?

"A little from column A and a little from column B," she laughs. "But nothing I didn't do to myself, you know. It's just life - you go around, play guitar, holler a lot, and see what happens. Sometimes it comes out alright."

Songs That Take Their Time

Carolyn's track Truth Is, from her latest album, features a twisting guitar line that wraps itself around the vocal. It's the kind of song that might trip up a lesser artist. "I've had that guitar line in my head for quite a while," she explains. "So, it was already under my fingers - then it was about finding the melody to suit it. I like being able to put those chunky parts in. It's like, 'Hey, there's a trick - let's see if it works.'"

A Call from Bob Dylan

It's one thing to be respected in the blues scene - it's another to get a phone call from Bob Dylan.

"It was frightening and reassuring at the same time," she recalls. "A friend told me Bob wanted to meet me - I thought they were joking. I drove to his place, we talked for hours, and I gave him a CD. I'd forgotten my number was on the sleeve, and the next morning he called me. I thought it was a prank and hung up on him!"

Luckily, Dylan called back. "He asked if I was awake, and I said, 'Yes sir, I am now!' He even gave me a writing assignment - a call-and-response verse for Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat. We talked music - he's a total musicologist and a lot of fun to hang out with. I've never changed my number, just in case he calls again."

Making Blues History with Mayall

Another milestone in Carolyn's journey was being invited by John Mayall to join the Bluesbreakers - the first female lead guitarist to do so.

"I'd met John a few times on the road and on a blues cruise. One day, while visiting Levon Helm's grave in Woodstock with my friend Cindy Cashdollar, I got a call from a number I didn't recognise. It was Gregg Azoff, John's long-time bassist. He asked if I'd like to play on a couple of tracks for John's new album - of course I said yes."

Then John himself got on the line. "He said,

‘Why don’t you just join the band?’ So I did.”

Carolyn dove into the back catalogue, learning 80 to 100 songs in preparation. Her first show with Mayall? A slot in the Blues Tent at the New Orleans Jazz Festival.

Owning Mistakes and Staying Real

Despite her résumé, Carolyn admits she still gets nervous.

“Oh no, I still get intimidated around other musicians. I’ve got imposter syndrome - the fear that someone’s going to figure out I don’t know what I’m doing and send me home!”

“Sometimes I’ve had to raise my hand mid-show and say, ‘Yep, that was me - let’s start over.’ It happens. I used to die of embarrassment, but now I just roll with it. Some mistakes are even hilarious. You’ve got to laugh.”

Choosing Favourites

Every artist has their favourites, and Carolyn’s new album is no different.

“It’s hard to choose, but Flower in Bloom is a weird psychedelic ballad that I really love. I don’t always play it live - sometimes the vibe’s just not right for a ballad. If a ballad and a dirty blues tune met in a dark alley, it’s not the ballad that’s coming out!”

“But sometimes you’re in a converted church or a venue with beautiful acoustics, and the mood strikes. I learned a lot about that from John Mayall. We played at the Bataclan after the tragedy there, and John performed One Life to Live, a song he wrote about his time in Korea. It meant so much in that moment. There were tears. That’s the power of the right song, in the right place, at the right time.”

Looking Ahead

Carolyn is already thinking about what comes next.

“I’m always writing, always looking for new stories to tell. It’ll be the next ten or twelve songs that feel like the right collection. I’ve got a few I’m hanging on to. These are interesting times - and interesting times make good music.”



“I still get intimidated around other musicians”





EXPLORE



BIG BLUES REVIEWS



CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE LOOK OUT HIGHWAY

Forty Below Records

This latest album is living proof that Charlie Musselwhite is still one of the best blues musicians around. He delivers with seasoned conviction, his voice rich with experience, and his harmonica work is as sharp as ever. Every note is played with taste, every phrase crafted with precision, reminding us that this bluesman's well runs deep. The album lays down eleven tracks of straight-up traditional blues, each soaked in feeling and authenticity. Musselwhite's signature touch brings a freshness to the form without ever losing its soul. This is blues music, the way it ought to be, timeless, heartfelt, and real. Just listen to the tones and styles of the opening title track, Look Out Highway and the listener is hooked on the feeling. Sad Eyes and Storm Warning have that Mississippi blues vibe; it's in the notes and offer that timeless atmospheric feel. Recorded at Kid Andersen's famed Greaseland Studios, the album benefits from that warm, analogue groove throughout. Andersen himself joins in on guitar, piano, and organ,



continuing a long-standing musical partnership with Musselwhite. The rest of the band, tour-tested and tight, includes Matt Stubbs on guitar, Randy Bermudes on bass, and June Core on drums. Special guests Al Kapone on Ghosts in Memphis and Edna Luckett on, Ready For Times to Get Better add flavourful vocal turns, that fit right into Musselwhite's blues gumbo.

This record isn't just another release it's a testament, a gem. A masterclass in modern traditional blues. For any blues lover looking for something real, raw, and rooted, Charlie Musselwhite has once again delivered the goods.

COLIN CAMPBELL

EXPLORE



BARTHOLOMEW'S BELLES

NEW ORLEANS R&B WOMEN, 1949 – 1957

Jasmine Records

The 31 tracks that make up New Orleans R&B Women 1949-1957 cover a lot of ground, genres and performers. With the likes of Jewel King, Rose Mitchell, Blanche Thomas, Joan Scott, Ruth Durand, Gloria Jean Pitts, and Annie Laurie all featured on a minimum of two songs each, the songs range from moody slow blues to lively brass infused jump jive. The New Orleans sound is found throughout the album, with strong piano playing on most tracks, and a febrile arrangement to most of the songs, none of which outstay their welcome, with the blues, gospel, and boogie woogie and early rock and roll rhythms pushed to the fore. The heavy swinging of Blanche Thomas's You Ain't So Such A Much and the slow blues of her Not the Way That I Love You. The Doo-wop opening of Joan Scott's My Wedding Day, and the guitar powered boogie of Hello Baby, which features Ruth Durand and Al Read in a dialogue is another interesting song. There are many tracks to enjoy on this album, and it serves as a good introduction to some singers and songs that are sometimes over-looked by both history and music fans.

BEN MACNAIR

BERNIE MARSDEN

ICONS

Conquest Music

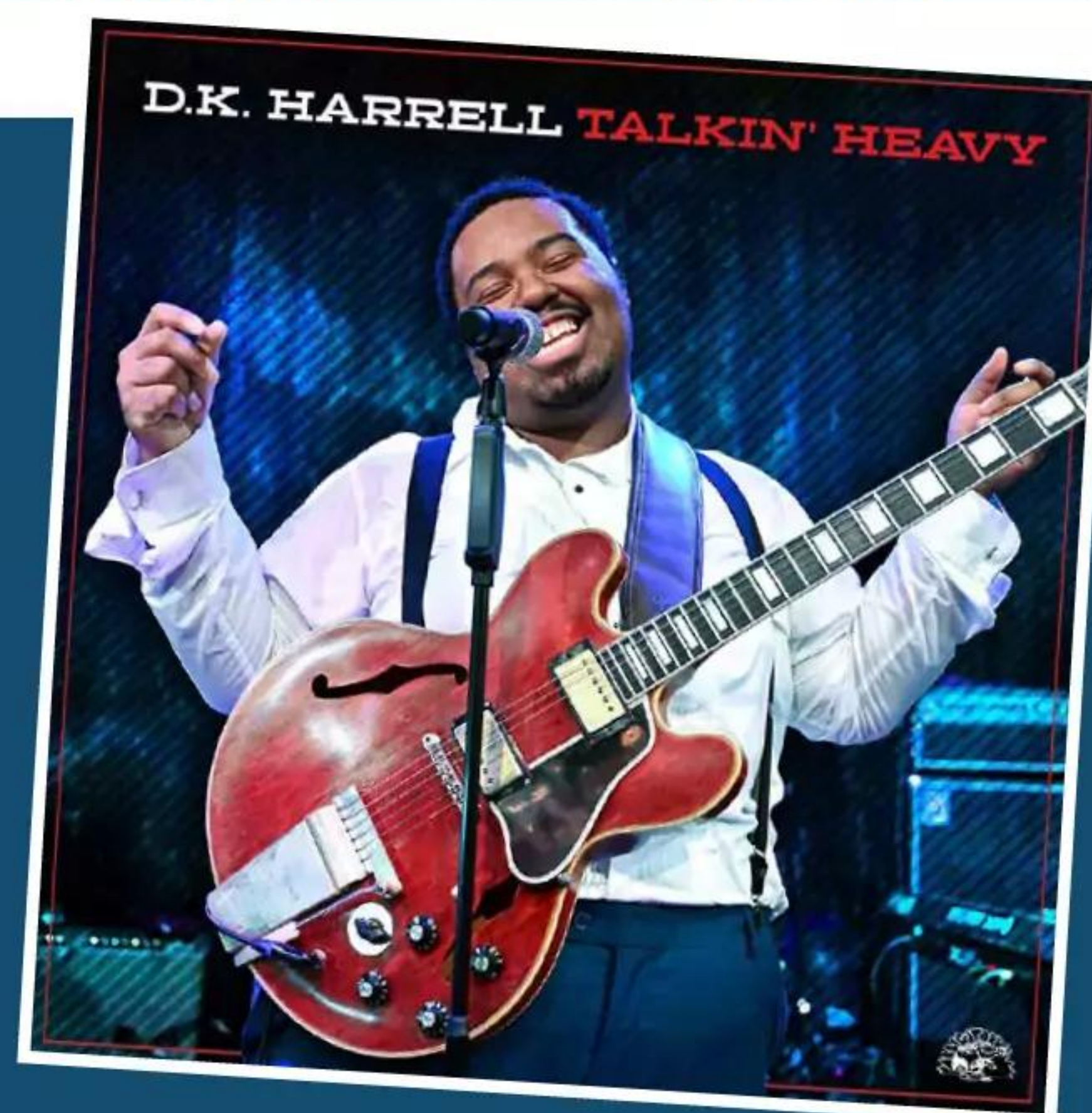
Billed as The Inspirations Series, this collection of albums by Bernie Marsden has culminated in this fine bunch of tunes, Icons. The songs and artists featured here are worthy of the name, Icons. Songs from the likes of Elmore James, Eric Clapton, and Rory Gallagher are given the Bernie Marsden seal of approval, thus putting his own name amongst the Icons of Blues Music. Shake Your Money Maker is the first to receive the Bernie treatment. Many people just

DK HARRELL

TALKIN' HEAVY

Alligator Records

With this new release, his Alligator Records debut, D.K. Harrell doesn't just arrive; he kicks the damn door open and walks through it like he was born for this. Already turning heads as a Blues Music Award-winning guitarist with a preacher's passion and a soul man's voice, Harrell stakes his claim among the vanguard of the new blues generation. He does it the only way he knows how by digging deep into the tradition, pouring himself into every note. This release hits hard and keeps it coming. Twelve originals, no fillers just grit, heart, and that stinging gui-



both a love letter to the past and a bold step into the future

tar tone that speaks louder than words. Harrell's voice, seasoned beyond its years, rises from the church pews and lands somewhere between street corner wisdom and front-porch honesty. The album, produced by Christoffer "Kid" Andersen at the fabled Greaseland Studio, captures Harrell in full stride. From the scorching opener A Little Taste, where the guitar crackles like frying grease, to the swaggering, Grown Now, a proud, chest-out statement of self-made strength, Harrell proves he's got more than chops, he's got stories to tell. Vibe With Me, cruises on a silky, feel-good groove, while the title track cuts deep, with Harrell sizing up a troubled world. By the time the rafter-shaking closing gospel laden, Praise These Blues rolls around, it's clear Harrell isn't just playing the blues, he's preaching them. This release is both a love letter to the past and a bold step into the future, a testament to the blues' enduring power and the rise of a young artist keeping the legacy of the blues genre glowing.



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COLIN CAMPBELL

LISTEN, WATCH AND DISCOVER MORE AT THESE ARTIST LINKS

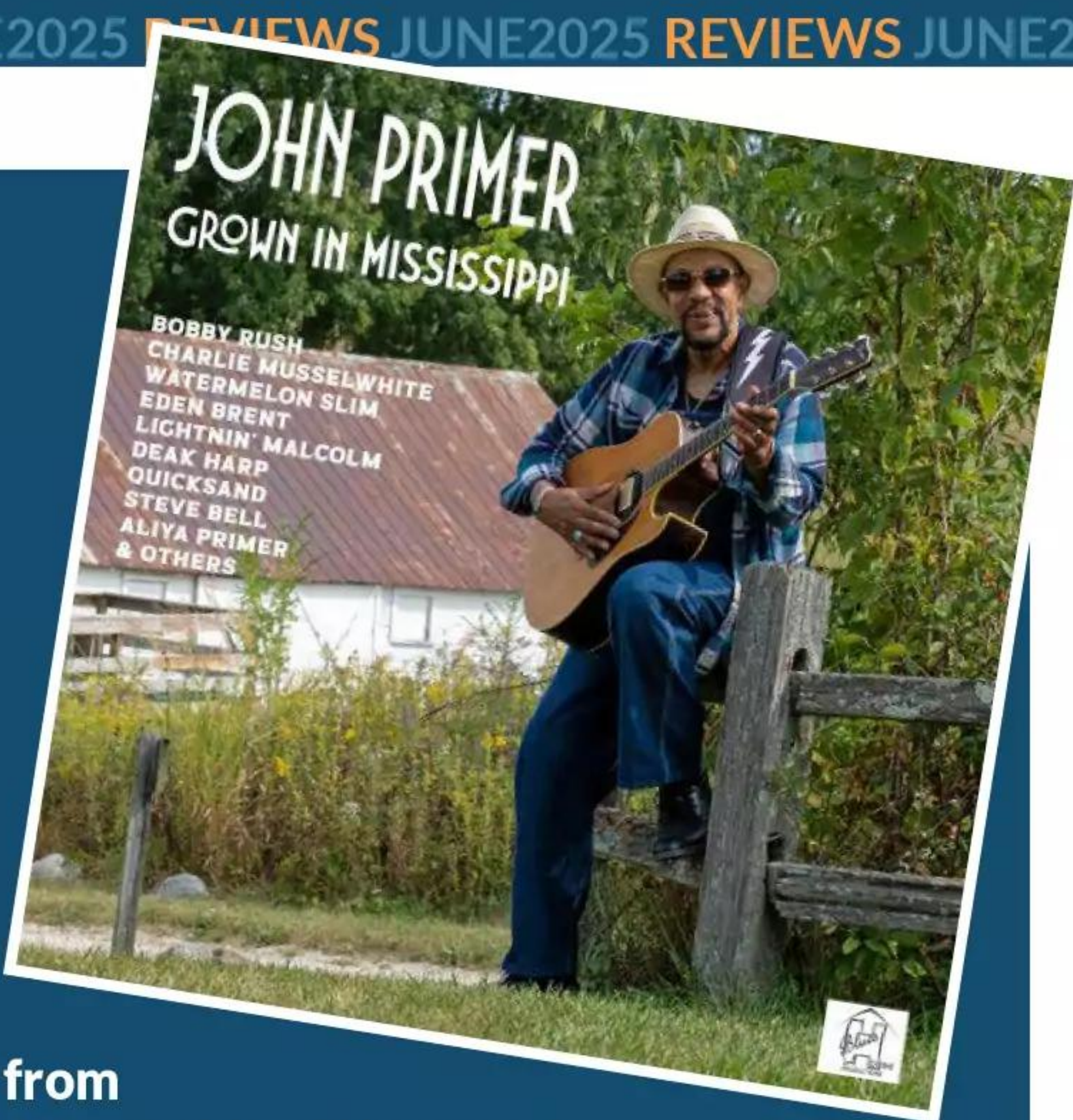


JOHN PRIMER

GROWN IN MISSISSIPPI

Blues House Productions

John Primer's latest album is a heartfelt tribute to his Mississippi roots, delivered with raw authenticity and a stellar lineup of blues royalty. With guest spots from legends like Bobby Rush, Charlie Musselwhite, Watermelon Slim, Eden Brent, and Lightnin' Malcolm, the record feels like a homecoming celebration wrapped in 14 deeply rooted tracks. It opens with John's Blues Holler, an a cappella piece that echoes chain gang rhythms



“Emotionally rich and masterfully played, this may be Primer’s finest work yet

with tambourine and crickets, setting the emotional tone. Born in Mississippi follows, with a stripped-down Elmore James-style blues, showcasing Primer’s expressive guitar and vocals. Reinterpreting some blues standards like Blues Before Sunrise, Down In The Bottom, and Walkin’ Blues are elevated by standout contributions, some greasy harmonica from Deak



Harp, Watermelon Slim’s dobro, and Billy Earheart’s keyboards shine. Primer’s reverence for tradition is clear, yet each track has his personal stamp. Nothing But A Chicken Wing with Bobby Rush oozes funk and fun, while, A Better Day and When I Met the Blues dive into soul-baring slow blues. Charlie Musselwhite adds tone on Baby Please Don’t Go and Shame Shame Shame, trading licks with Primer in joyous fashion. Family joins in on the spiritual Lay My Burdens Down, with daughter Aliya Primer delivering angelic vocals. The album closes on a homespun note with John’s Crawdad Song, harkening back to his didley bow beginnings. Emotionally rich and masterfully played, this may be Primer’s finest work yet, a powerful homage from one of the last great bluesmen still carrying the torch.

COLIN CAMPBELL



LISTEN, WATCH AND DISCOVER
MORE AT THESE ARTIST LINKS



KTBA Records

Anyone who's seen Larry McCray live knows he's the real deal - a blistering guitarist with one of the most soulful voices in blues. While earlier albums hinted at his power, Heartbreak City, his second release on Joe Bonamassa's KTBA label, finally captures that full force.

With Bonamassa and Josh Smith producing, McCray sounds confident, relaxed, and fully in control. The opener Try To Be A Good Man eases in with a laid-back soul feel, McCray's vocal bringing Bill Withers to mind. Horns and backing vocals from Jade MacRae and Dannielle De Andrea

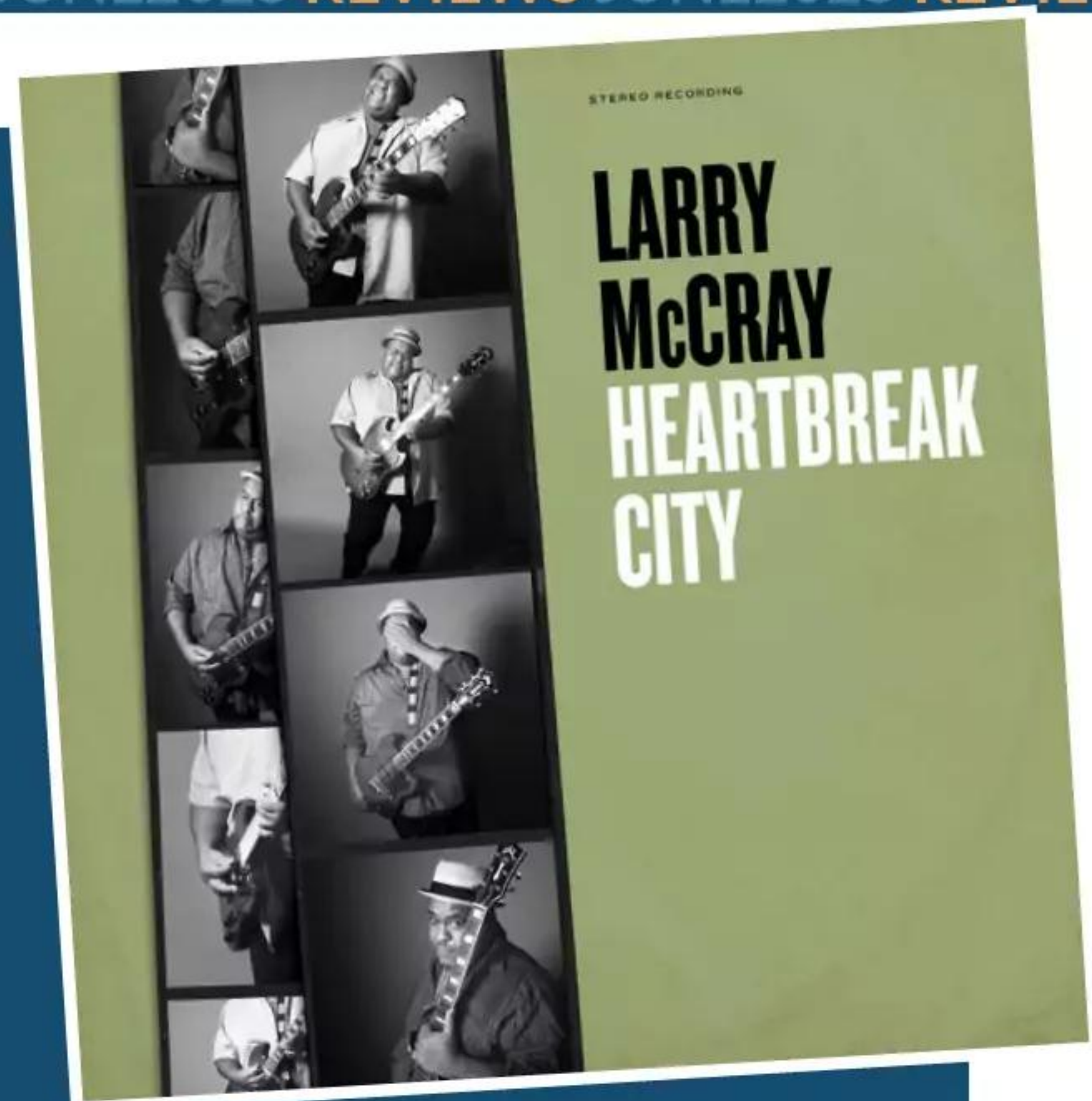
“Every blues fan should own a Larry McCray album, I recommend this one”

build the track beautifully, before the guitar takes flight. The title track is a slow-burning seven-minute epic, packed with feeling and subtle interplay, anchored by Reese Wynans on Hammond. Kirk Fletcher guests on three tracks, adding fire to the upbeat Bye Bye Blues, locking in tightly with the brass section. Bright Side has more of a Chicago feel, with guitars and horns building in intensity.

Everything Falls On Me opens with just guitar and drums, shifting into a swinging rhythm - a co-write with Larry's partner Peggy, who also wrote most of the lyrics. **I Know What I've Done** is a slow-burning

ballad of regret, while *Keep On Loving My Baby*, recorded spontaneously, channels McCray's live energy with loose, joyful charm. *Hangman* brings a rural Delta vibe with gospel-tinged vocals. *Stop Your Crying* is tender and understated, with tasteful piano from Wynans. The closer *Crazy World* shifts into funky territory, with tight grooves and space for guitar and keys to shine. This is McCray at his best - expressive, soulful, and sharp. After forty years on the road, he's still playing with heart and conviction. *Heartbreak City* deserves a place in every blues fan's collection.

STEVE YOURGLIVCH



**LISTEN, WATCH AND DISCOVER
MORE AT THESE ARTIST LINKS**

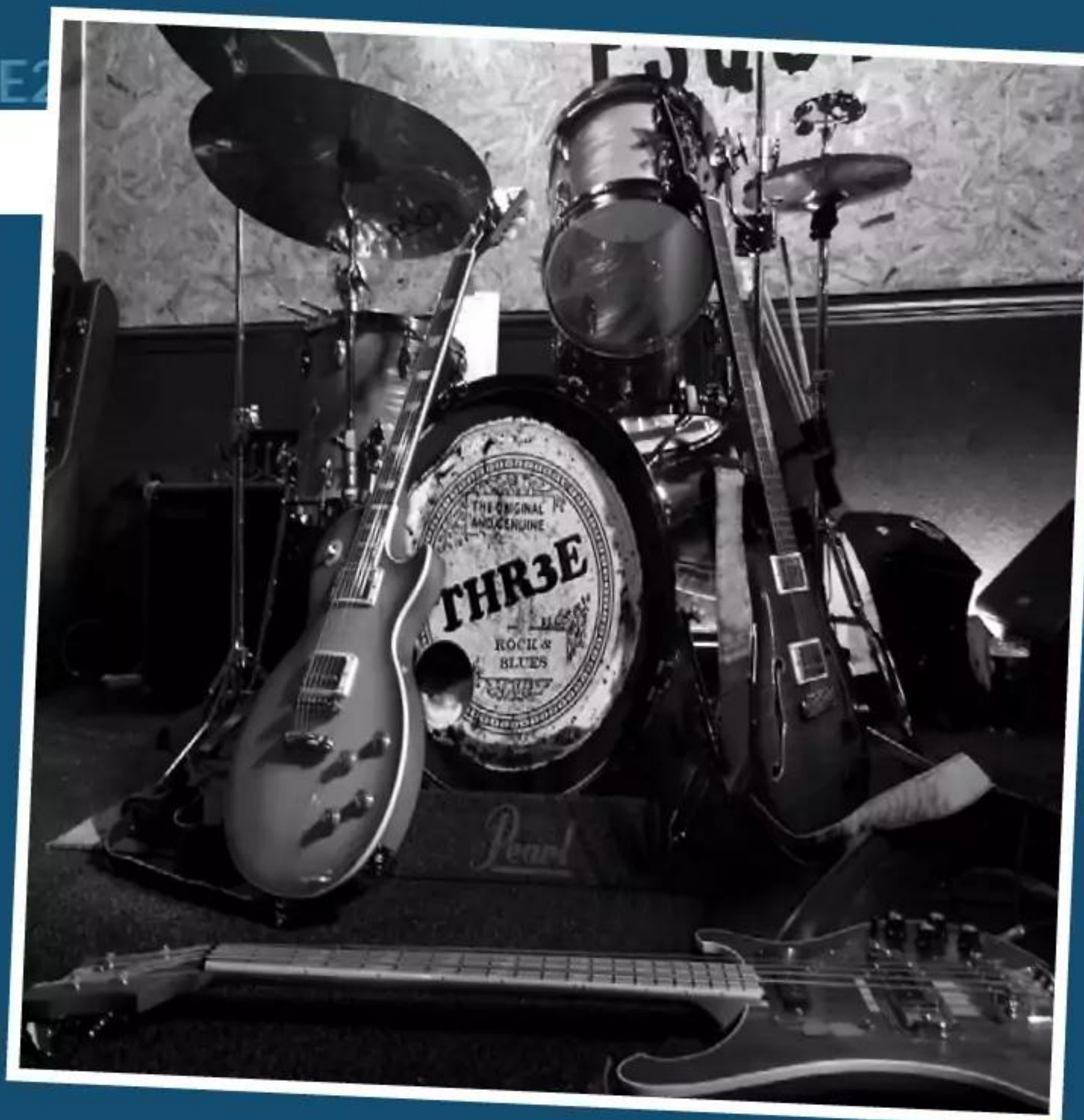


THR3E

OUT ALL NIGHT

Independent

“Original homegrown rock & blues” is what Thr3e - a four-piece from Bedford - tells us they purvey on this, their third album. It certainly is a fine set, beginning with a gritty dose of Medicine, somewhat reminiscent of The Rolling Stones sound of the late 60s/ early 70s in structure, feel and the vocals of Steve Woodward. Fellow singer/ guitarist Carlos Linnett is just a little mellower on Wrong But Right, another fine blues-rocker; the two frontmen share



“ guaranteed to get heads, legs and hips shaking manically

vocal and guitar solo duties between them throughout. The influence of The Stones is evident again on the solid riffing on the title track, and inspirations from other classic bands like The Who and The Allman Brothers’ southern boogie can also be found on other tracks. Lee Vernon guests on blues harmonica on the early 70s rock styled Woke Up Tired, and it’s

“Spot The Riff” with The Vow - it’s obvious! Lee also turns up on Might Not Be Coming Back with its strong blues inflections - not a straight 12 bar, but certainly bluesy enough, nice slide guitar by Steve too. 1000 Miles From Home is a powerhouse, infectious boogie-blues - no

great surprise that it is the band’s set closer, it’s guaranteed to get heads, legs and hips shaking manically. The final track, Slow Songs, deliberately sounds rather like vintage Free - that pretty much ensures at least a favourable reception in my house, and this gets far more than that. Steve’s guitar work captures the Paul Kossoff sound very effectively and impressively, whilst Carlos certainly does a good enough job on the vocal, even getting something of a Paul Rodgers timbre in places. Nice to spot the Free song titles in the lyrics too. So why Thr3e? I fink I know...

NORMAN DARWEN

see Bernie as a great guitarist, which he is, by the way. What they tend to overlook is the fact that Bernie Marsden is also a fantastic vocalist. Purple Haze (Jimi Hendrix) may be a bit of a surprise choice on a Blues album, but Hendrix was a hell of a Blues player, not just the avant-garde wild man of the late sixties. A couple of Bernie’s tunes make it onto the record, and why not, I hear you ask. Kestrel and the final track, Barford Blues, can easily sit alongside the other choices. I have been a fan of Bernie Marsden for as long as I can remember, and this collection of albums only goes to reinforce my beliefs that he was one of this country’s finest guitarists. If I had to pick out just one song that appealed to me the most on here, I’d plump for Calling Card, by the late great Rory Gallagher. Not only is it my favourite Gallagher tune, but this particular version also features one of the finest Blues guitarists around at the moment and a dear friend of mine, Jim Kirkpatrick. Put all that together, and you get one of the best cover versions of a Blues tune that I’ve ever heard. Treat yourself, get the album, you can thank me and Bernie further on down the road.

STEPHEN HARRISON

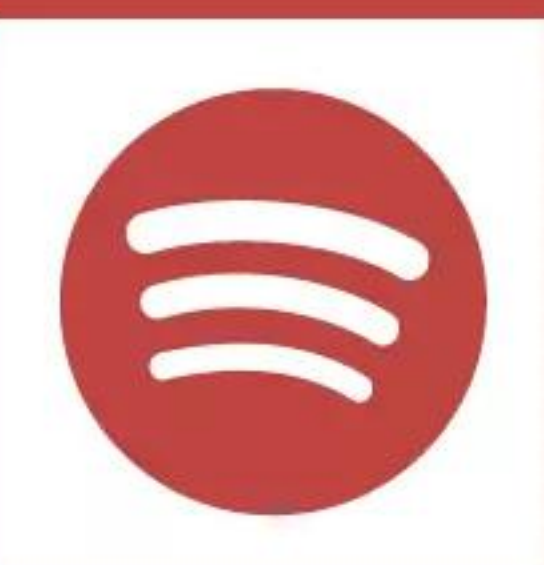
BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON

THE KING OF HOLY BLUES

Acrobat Music

With nothing but his growling vocals and virtuoso slide guitar Blind Willie Johnson was an incredibly influential blues figure. With an interest in religion, his early recordings set the template for blues in the late 1920’s and 1930’s, and although it only happened after his death in 1945, was a pivotal figure in the 1960’s blues and folk boom, with many of his songs being covered by many other artists. His influence has seen his music blasted into space, with Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground, a rumination for spectral vocals and minimalist slide guitar featuring as one of the songs on Voyager One. Other songs, such as Nobody’s Fault but Mine, It’s Nobody Business but Mine, Let Your Light Shine on Me, Lord I just Can’t Keep from Crying sometimes, and John The Revelator have had a life years after they were first recorded. His music has been covered by figures as diverse as Led Zeppelin, Nina Simone, and Ry

LISTEN, WATCH AND DISCOVER
MORE AT THESE ARTIST LINKS



Cooder. With the thirty tracks on this two-disc set being recorded between 1927 and 1930 the remastering on this collection gives them a vivid life, whilst the brilliance of these performances, often assisted by Johnson's first wife Willie B Harris on harmony vocals. Although Johnson led a tragic life, being blinded as a seven year old, and living in poverty, there is often a lot of joy in these recordings, with such songs as Go With Me To The Land, and Sweeter as The Years Roll By, and although it is nearly a hundred years ago, Everybody Ought to Treat A Stranger Right is more timely than it has ever been.

BEN MACNAIR

BRODY BUSTER REDEMPTION

Independent

On his latest nine-track release, Buster takes the reins in every sense, writing seven of the songs, handling lead vocals, guitar, and harmonica, and pouring his soul into each performance. He's joined by a seasoned cast: Jackie Myers (organ, piano), Ian Pond, drums, Terry Dry, bass, Howard Mayan on slide guitar, Jacque Garoutte bass, rhythm guitar, backing vocals, and Danielle Nicole lending harmonies on two tracks. The album kicks off with Can You Hear Me, a cathartic howl from the depths. With thunderous instrumentation and raw, unfiltered emotion, Buster confronts addiction head-on, screaming into the void for connection or maybe salvation. It's intense, visceral, and sets a high emotional bar. Born To Be Bad follows with a more restrained groove, where reflection replaces rage. "It only took me forty years to live the life I should," he sings, owning a hard-won redemption. There's shame, grit, and a bluesman's honesty. Deadwood Shuffle explodes next, barely three minutes but packed with fire. Buster's harmonica is fierce and fearless; a reminder he still holds command of his instrument. Working For The Devil chronicles the seduction of vice through relentless labour and a slow fall from grace. It's one of the most revealing cuts on the album, a personal reckoning set to a driving beat. At the halfway mark, Protection From Your Affection adds layers: on the surface, it's a breakup song. Dig deeper, and it's a cry for relief from inner demons. Whether

about lost love or lost control, it lands hard and true, a superb release, highly recommended.

COLIN CAMPBELL

THIS IS BUDDY GUY LIVE AT NEW ORLEANS HOUSE, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

Vangu4ard

Originally released in 1968, "This Is Buddy Guy" can only be described as one, if not the finest, live album released by the great man. Surrounded by a superb band that includes a tremendous horn section, Buddy Guy tells his story of the Blues, and with some aplomb. The opening track, I Got My Eyes On You, has long been a firm favourite Buddy Guy tune. It's the soul that he puts into the vocals, and let's not forget that Buddy Guy just happens to be one of the greatest guitarists of all time. As I mentioned earlier, the brilliant line-up of musicians at this gig certainly plays their part. (You Give Me) Fever is normally associated with Brenda Lee and some guy by the name of Elvis. Here, Buddy Guy gives the song a silky smooth Soul vibe, with the occasional vocal rasp of down and dirty Blues. A brilliant rendition, and the first time I've heard Guy do this song. Knock On Wood, written by Eddie Floyd and Steve Cropper, and released as a disco tune in 1979 by Ami Stewart. I'm not one to offend anyone, but I'm pretty certain that Messers Floyd and Cropper would have been rather more pleased with the version on this album. I Had A Dream Last Night is ten minutes of Blues heaven. This is what Buddy Guy does best: he tells the story of the Blues like no other, and this song encapsulates the feelings so well. You know a song, or a performance is good, you get goosebumps, well, after listening to this, my arms were covered. If a young person wants to know about Blues music, play them this live recording. They'll thank you.

STEPHEN HARRISON

CRISTOPHER WYZE AND THE TELLERS DVD - LIVE IN

CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI

AT THE SHACK UP INN

Apart from the album, Live In Clarksdale, two very interesting things make this a must-have package: a wonderful DVD highlighting the band's performance at the Shack Up Inn, and a documentary that gives you a birds-eye view of the town of Clarksdale. But, for this issue, let's concentrate on the live performance at the juke joint. Joining Christopher (Vocals and Harmonica) are John Boyle (Electric Guitar and Slide Guitar), Gerry Murphy (Bass), Mark Yacovone (Keys), and Douglas Banks (Drums). For me, this is my dream kind of gig. I have yet to experience a gig in a real juke joint, especially in Clarksdale, but this is what I always imagined it would be. The atmosphere is brilliant, you can feel it oozing out of the walls and floorboards, the walls decorated with historical memorabilia from near and far. So, to the gig, Three Hours From Memphis opens the proceedings with Chris Wyze delivering wonderful vocals and the band grooving along, giving the audience a taste of things to come. Gigs like this, for me, are how Blues artists and bands should be seen, raw, with no place to hide, forget about all those 20,000 seater arenas, stadium gigs and the like, get down to the Shack Up Inn and witness bands such as these guys. Money Spent Blues probably sums up most of the history of Blues music; the title itself does the explaining. Stuck In The Mud brings to the stage Irene Smits on backing vocals. Aside from the dulcet tones of Chris Wyze, her harmonies are nothing short of exquisite. Songs like, Cotton Ain't King and Good Friend Gone are two of the best Blues songs I've heard in many a while. That's the beauty of this whole package: it introduces you to things that, for some reason, may have passed you by. There are a couple of covers that end the evening's proceedings, the first is a cover of the Scrapper Blackwell tune, How Long, How Long Blues. Chris explains part of the reason behind the choice, Blackwell originated from Indiana, as does Chris Wyze. The final song, Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out has been covered by more people than I care to imagine, all great renditions. This version is slightly different, it's almost delivered at half the normal speed of the others and the original. I've honestly not heard it done like this before. The

DVD is a must-see, a brilliant band in a wonderful setting, you can almost feel the soil and all it contains; this is how you play the Blues.

STEPHEN HARRISON

FLAVIO PALUDETTI WITH THE HONNET BROTHERS

TELL ME YOUR LIES

Independent

Italian guitarist Flavio Paludetti marks a new chapter in his accomplished career with the release of Tell Me Your Lies. The seven tracks contained herein reflect the love felt for various subjects throughout Flavio's life. Be it his son Luca on the funky instrumental Cocco or artists that he has been influenced by such as Canadian guitarist and friend Steve Kozak on the jazzy Kozak Stomp or the 60's funk band The Meters on Funk In D. Accompanying Flavio on this album are Massimo Chivilo on 2nd

guitar and French musical duo The Honnet Brothers (Anthony on keys and Davy on drums). The album is as much a showcase for Anthony's stupendous Hammond playing as Flavio's sublime mix of jazz/funk/blues guitar and soulful vocals. I Wanna Be You is uplifting as you let Anthony's Hammond organ wash over you, Flavio urging the listener to let go of their thoughts and troubles, love life and be free. Tell Me Your Lies is a typical slow blues about the love of a woman who is walking away. However Flavio doesn't beg for reconsideration, he plays beautiful blues guitar as his soulful vocal urges the lady to stay a while and share her indiscretions before departing. Donny Hathaway's 1969 track The Ghetto is covered in groovy fashion. Anthony's keys set the scene before the whole band form a vocal choir complete with hand claps whilst Flavio uses his voice as an extra instrument before an extended jam mid track displays the extraordinary talents of a band as they celebrate their love of black music. Humorous lyrics are used to highlight differences in love very

cleverly as Without A Barbecue uses human's sometimes hypocritical love of animals as a reference. The vibrant Funk In D closes the album as the band display their love of The Meters. Formed in 1965 the American band are considered one of the originators of funk, demonstrated perfectly here by Flavio and his band. If you like your blues with a jazzy groovy funky edge and lashings of keyboards be sure to check out Tell Me Your Lies.

TAF ROCK

JAMES ROBERT WEBB

WEEKEND OUTLAWS

Bison Creek Records

Well. I'm slightly embarrassed to admit, but this is the first time that I have come across this particular artist. So, with a little bit of help from Google, I now know that during the day, Webb is a physician, and by night, and in any spare time, he is a very gifted singer-song-

LISTEN TO THE BLUES MATTERS

PODCAST



Listen to some amazing interviews with the artists we've been lucky enough to speak to for the magazine. **NOW ON YOUTUBE!**



SAMANTHA FISH

In this exciting episode, Adam Kennedy sits down with blues sensation Samantha Fish, known for her electrifying guitar skills, powerful vocals, and genre-defying sound.



TAJ MAHAL

We sit down with one of the most legendary figures in blues and world music-Taj Mahal. At 82 years young, this pioneering artist continues to defy expectations...

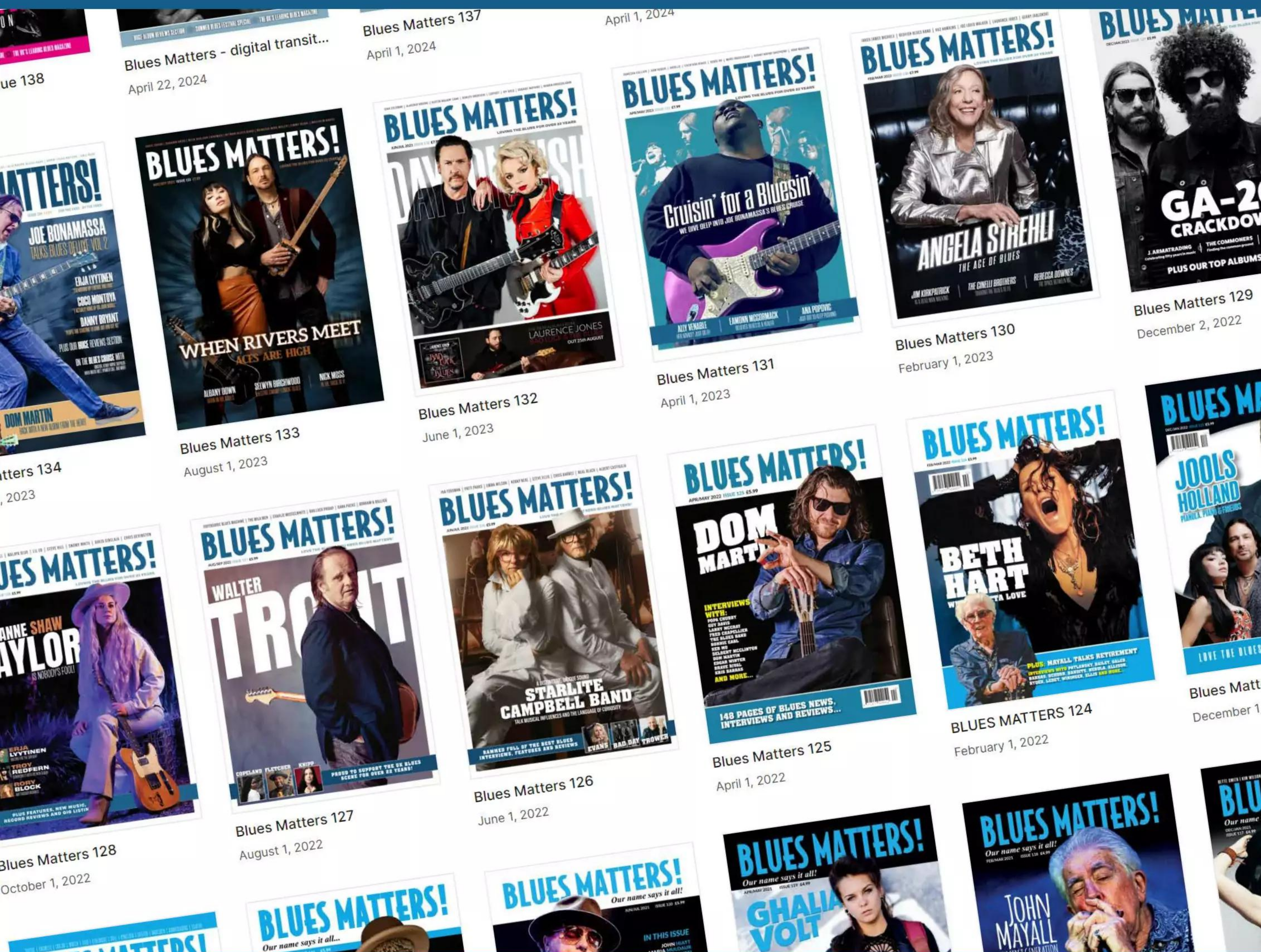


TERRY JUNESHALL

In this episode, Steve Harrison sits down with Terry JUNeshall, founder of JUNeshall Records, to discuss the release of his highly anticipated new album.

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writer and musician. Weekend Outlaw is the fifth release of his career, and even though it is my first introduction, I need to check out the previous four albums very quickly. Thirteen tracks adorn this album, not your usual eight or nine, and every one is an absolute gem. The title track opens proceedings, a gutsy Blues/Rocker with powerful vocals from Webb. From then on in, I'm totally hooked, the songs rang efrom Blues/Rock to Country, Country ballads and a wee bit of Honky Tonk in between thrown in for good measure. Ride Or Die put me slightly in mind of Vince Gill, it has that Hillbilly feel with hints of soft rock, and let's face facts, if anything puts you in mind of Vince Gill, it has to be quality. Local Participatin' Honky Tonk has all the ingredients to make you shake what your mamma gave ya, while at the same time, making yoy shuffle your feet as though you are in the middle of a Line Dancing contest. This is what draws me into the album, it is well produced, well crafted, and it puts me into a peaceful, easy feeling, now, where have I heard that phrase before? It is quite rare to get an album where every song touches you in some way, but that is exactly what Weekend Outlaw has done to me. I'm a little late to the James Robert Webb party, but now that I'm here, I'm here to stay.

STEPHEN HARRISON

JON SLIDEWELL AND THE REEDCUTTERS POOR BOY BLUES

Palatine Music

A lovely old Skool British R'n'B LP from this outfit based in Stockport, just south of Manchester. This is very much a good timin', good rockin' set right from the off. The title track – an original composition as are all twelve songs – opens the set, an original, simple Chicago styled lump-de-lump rhythm overlaid with some classic slide playing by Mr. Slidewell (indeed he does!), and Jon's mid Atlantic vocals. He is on lead guitar and harp for the follow-up, So In Love, a real rocker with a hint of Nine Below Zero in the energy department. By now, your feet should be tapping (at least!), and The Girl Next Door has a modified boogie rhythm and Jake Poole providing a nifty

guitar break, before Someone New finds Jon again picking up his slide and a swagger to his vocals on a gritty number that is Greater Manchester's answer to Hound Dog Taylor. Half Boy Half Man is a punky-sounding song that could come from the sixties beat-boom, with Honey, We're Thru a year or two later: freak-beat-tinged, maybe. The Devil's Make is a strong song, along the lines of Muddy Waters' The Same Thing but taken a little faster. Towards the end of the set, Jon and crew broaden their approach, with Love Disfigured Me adopting a more contemporary sound, the solo Down So Long hinting at Skip James, and Theme For Mr James a Chuck Berry-flavoured instrumental. In contrast, the set ends with the folk-flavoured Cloak And Dagger, originally recorded on a Sony Walkman - most definitely old Skool! Do note that all the songs generally last a couple of minutes, short, snappy, to the point. The overall effect is like listening to a bunch of your favourite singles one after another.

VICTOR IAN LEYLAND

LARRY DARNELL FOR YOU MY LOVE THE SINGLES COLLECTION 1949 - 1960

Acrobat

Oh my! Every now and again a CD collection pops through the door which truly falls way outside my normal listening fayre and an artist completely unknown to me. Left with the problem of how to be objective in my comments, I put this collection in the player and sat back to really listen. Transported back to the early post WW2 years I found the experience actually relaxing not only due to the lack of strident guitars, keyboards etc but by their replacement with small, and big band, dance and swing combos. Not quite Ellington, Basie, Shaw or Miller but most certainly cut from similar musical pedigrees. To actually name the bands fronted by Larry include those of Howard Biggs, Leroy Kirkland and Paul Gayten. So here Larry is surrounded by plenty of fine Blues and Jazz horn sections supporting his excellent vocal talents. As you listen you are transported to the swinging clubs of New Orleans. This collection opens with his 1949 hit I'll Get Along Somehow Pt1

& Pt2 this second half includes, what would become a bit of a trademark, where Larry would go into a spoken section then return to the melody. These, along with six other releases from his first year of recording, provided big top ten hits in what were then the Billboard R&B charts. These songs were For You My Love, Lost My Baby, I Love You My Baby and Oh! Babe. There is, included here, a very fine interpretation of Billie Holiday's classic God Bless The Child. When he hits his stride on the song Sundown I have become really engaged with this collection. Yes a different era but we can all appreciate quality can't we?

GRAEME SCOTT

LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY VICKSBURG BLUES

Acrobat Music The Singles and Albums
1930-61

A tremendous three CD seventy-two track Collection which covers the Singles and Albums released by Little Brother Montgomery on a variety of labels, including Paramount, Bluebird and Melotone between 1930-47. In addition to later recordings between 1954-61 on labels like Saydisc and Bluesville, these recordings highlight an exceptional Blues Pianist and Vocalist who had a significant influence on the likes of Otis Span and Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup. The sound reproduction is generally very good although some of the early recordings with vocalist Irene Scruggs are fairly scratchy, but as they are nearly one hundred years old this can be forgiven. The opening title song Vicksburg Blues is a classic and is a staple for Piano led Blues players everywhere. There are actually a further four versions of this song across the three CD's, he clearly had a fixation with this song. The material is split into three key categories: Little Brother Montgomery (LBM) playing solo, accompanying other vocalist including Irene Scruggs, Annie Turner and Creole George Guenson or with a backing musician in a small band format. During his career LBM did move outside of the Blues format playing Jazz and swing but thankfully this CD concentrates on his Blues work. The songs are in chronological order

REVEREND FREAKCHILD

BLUESMAN OF SORTS

Where do I start, The Reverend is a bit of a mystery to a lot of people, his music, steeped in Blues but with his own unique and unorthodox take on tradition has left a solid foundation. What I mean is, if each man/woman has the Blues, isn't it going to be interpreted in their own way, Style and Freak Child does exactly that. The Reverend, making his own sound along the way, having died at a relatively young age (33), it's hard to imagine that anyone could leave such a lasting impression but here we have a double album of fantastic tracks. Oozing in tradition that transport me, not only back in time but to a dive of a juke joint somewhere on the delta, he not only captures the character and spirit of the songs but makes them his own. If you like your Blues served up like I do, with twists and turns like life itself, then this is for you. This is moonshine sipping, porch sitting stuff, his voice is easy listening like a old relative telling you stories of their life, which is hard to take in considering how young he departed this mortal coil. At times, whilst listening, I get the feeling that some tracks were done in one take, recorded live in studio and someone said, yep that'll do! Of course there's classics on here like Can't be Satisfied, Come on in My Kitchen, Day Late and Dollar Short but who cares, when they are done so well, a double album of nineteen tracks with the last two being live recordings, a fitting legacy by a man known for being a Blues encyclopaedia and mystical figure, one thing is for sure, its no mystery as to how good this album is.

**THE ALEXIS P
SUTER BAND**
JUST STAY HIGH

With her band's latest release, Alexis P Suter delivers a soul and blues -drenched sermon from the crossroads of blues, gospel, and funk. Known for her thunderous contralto and commanding presence, Suter doesn't just sing, she testifies. This new release is a fierce, deeply human collection that balances raw vulnerability with spiritual uplift, all backed by a tight, road-tested band. Opening with the groove and emotionally laden, *God Gave Me The Blues*, Suter sets the tone: defiant, urgent, and unshakably real. The title track, *Just Stay High*, is a hypnotic mantra of resilience, riding a slow-burn funk rhythm while Suter's

“This is Suter at her boldest, weathered, wise, and utterly unfiltered

voice hovers somewhere between Mahalia Jackson and Mavis Staples. It's not about getting high in the usual sense, it's about staying lifted in spirit, even when the world weighs you down. Isolation, channels deep Delta blues with a modern edge, while I Can't Breathe, brings hard-hitting social commentary wrapped in a funk infused stomp. Suter's band is in top form, layering warm Hammond organ swells, gritty guitar riffs, and snappy drums that echo Muscle Shoals and Memphis in equal measure. There's no gloss here, just soul. In a time when many artists chase trends, Suter leans hard into truth and tradition as a balm and a battle cry, reminding us that staying spiritually elevated might be the most radical act of all. This is Suter at her boldest, weathered, wise, and utterly unfiltered. Blues may be the foundation, but these fourteen tracks reach for the heavens.

COLIN CAMPBELL

**LISTEN, WATCH AND DISCOVER
MORE AT THESE ARTIST LINKS**





SCRAPPER BLACKWELL

MR. SCRAPPERS BLUES

Prestige Bluesville

What re-released albums such as this one do, and do very well, is to remind us of how good some of these guys were, and how much they influenced future generations of Blues artists. Ironically, this album was recorded and released in the same year that probably the most influential Blues album was released, King Of The Delta Blues Singers, which was the world’s re-introduction to Robert Johnson. Now I’m not saying that Mr. Scrappers Blues would, or did have the same effect, but it is a brilliant collection of Country Blues songs. Goin’ Where The Manon Crosses The Yellow Dog is not the most recalled song the world has ever heard, but it does have its history firmly planted in an age-old Blues tradition, the railroads. It’s a story about a train line, the L &N being crossed at various times and by various modes. It then contains Scrapper’s own individual Blues language, which a lot of Country Blues artists did back in the day. “A” Blues is a wonderful instrumental ditty with Scrapper demonstrating how he plays in certain keys, hence “A” Blues; he does the same with “E” Blues. But the younger generation of Blues musicians can certainly learn a lot about guitar phrasing just by listening to these two tracks. This has been a very satisfying trip down memory lane, but it also high-

lights how some of the finest Country Blues singers can often get overlooked when one delves into Blues history. Let’s reverse the trend a little, get a copy of this album.

STEPHEN HARRISON

SLEEPY JOHN ESTES

THE VICTOR, DECCA & BLUEBIRD RELEASES 1929-1941

Acrobat Music

This double album collection of fifty tracks provides most of the early releases by this influential Blues artist, covering the period between 1929-41. On these songs he plays solo on guitar and vocals or as a member of the Delta Boys and the Three J’s Jug band. I had not appreciated how influential Sleepy John was on some latter-day Rock superstars, the liner notes highlight quotes from Robert Plant, John Lennon and Bob Dylan about his influence on them during their formative years. The opening track Diving Duck Blues is one of the first songs recorded by Sleepy John Estes and will be familiar to most Blues fans. It is classic Country Blues with a coarse vocal and guitar accompanied by Piano and Mandolin played by Jab Jones and James Rachell respectively. These musicians play on another classic song Milk Cow Blues. The tracks are in chronological date order with disc two starting from 1937. There are some subtle

differences as the era progresses with some advancements in recording techniques, he also includes Charlie Pickett on Guitar who certainly helps create a fuller sound. The song Floating Bridge tells a true story where Sleepy John falls into a river and is saved from drowning by a band member, the lyrics also include the words “Muddy Waters”, which may/may not have been an influence on one McKinley Morganfield. Listening to these tracks it is easy to understand why Sleepy John was so influential on other musicians across the decades, his story telling and musicianship are infectious. While these tracks only go up to 1941 it is pleasing to note that in later life Sleepy John was “re-discovered” and in the 1960’s he played and recorded in Europe, a true Blues great.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

THE DRINKARD SINGERS

FEAT. CISSY HOUSTON

THE ALBUMS COLLECTION AND MORE 1956-1962

Acrobat Music

A double album packed full of fast paced, old school, 50’s, foot stomping, sawdust flying, rousing and raising the roof, every day’s a Church day Gospel music! Fast paced, the songs sound as original, 50’s in every respect with a little of the rock n roll beat coming in as you’d expect from the late 50’s to early 60’s. From the introduction of some of the songs by a very English/American, this is as old school as it gets. The first Gospel group to perform at Carnegie Hall and the first to appear at the Newport Folk Festival, the group brought notice and launched the careers of both Cissy H and Judy Clay. A double album packed full of nostalgia, historic moments culminating with a stunning performance from a 1963 TV show. This double album is a brilliant showcase for their uplifting, extrovert and inspiring style that is as close to soul as it is to gospel. If you like your Blues, paired back, old school, rough and ready (including the odd hissing) hand clapping, foot stomping, rousing Gospel - this double album is a dream come true for you.

JEAN KNAPPITT

THE KERRY KEARNEY BAND

SELF TITLED

Paradiddle

One could imagine that releasing a self-titled album might be something a band would do by way of introducing themselves to the public at the start of a career. That is not the case here as this band have released something in the order of eighteen albums during the course of their career. Fronted by Kerry himself, guitars and vocals, he is supported by long term associates Jack Licitra keys, Gerry Sorrentino bass and Mario Staiano on drums. That core, augmented by various others throughout this rather tasty ten-track release, will hit the shops on June 20th and I can heartily recommend parting with some of your funds, as you will truly enjoy when it hits your ears. There is a certain likeable rawness to the grooves which just works on every level. It rolls on over you, in the way seeing a band live in concert would, and I suspect that quite a lot of the basic sound of the album was recorded as a band playing together in one room. There is nothing particularly complex, or boundary pushing here just straightforward Blues including three covers. Otis Rush's All Your Love opens the album then, with guest vocals by Camryn Quinlan a slow Blues named Harder To Breathe showcases fine slide work by Kerry. With you volume turned way up Walk Right Out The Door, Rub Me Raw and Voodoo Ways will have you dancing around your house. Dylan's, Meet Me In The Morning pulls the tempo back to a moody groove before the mandolin driven instrumental West Of Ashley takes over. Off To The Jubilee rounds the main course off in fine fashion. This is my kind of Blues, straightforward, foot tapping and really brilliant fun.

GRAEME SCOTT

THE MIGHTY BOSSCATS

4000 WEEKS

Independent

There are many things that I admire about The Mighty Bosscats: great

songs, brilliant production, and one hell of a live band to boot. But above all, the thing that I admire most is that you simply can't pigeon-hole this band into one particular genre. On all of the albums, and in a live setting, The Mighty Bosscats delve into Blues, Country, Soul, Boogie, and everywhere in between. If the Ford Mondeo used to be called a world car, then the Bosscats can certainly be called a world band. World music, if you like. Walking In Your Shoes demonstrates the wonderful harmonies that these guys have at their disposal. Simplistic, laid-back, this tune is like a silky smooth coffee, something to treasure. The one track that does kind of do what it says on the tin is, Blue Bottle Blues, a quirky Country Blues and Honky Tonk ditty, with a clean crisp guitar sound, courtesy of Richard Townend. Now, please don't think that I'm being presumptuous, but Gulf Of America does have certain lyrics that are in tune with certain things that are currently making headlines across the pond. Nonetheless, it is a well-written, brilliantly executed piece of music. Give Me All Your Time does put in my mind the thought that this could have been one of those songs that you hear about, an unreleased track found in a cupboard somewhere at Abbey Road Studios from a lost session by The Beatles. It has that ring to it, a Lennon and McCartney composition would not be a million miles away from this tune. I've thoroughly enjoyed 4000 Weeks, and I can't wait to see some of the tracks performed live.

STEPHEN HARRISON

THOMAS HEPPEL

LIVE AT THE SOUND LOUNGE

Independent

Blues-rocking singer/ guitarist Thomas takes no prisoners with the first two numbers on these seventy-five minutes long album recorded at the venue in Sutton where he launched his debut album in 2023 – and sold-out the place! Backed by Howard Head on bass and Jack Bryant occupying the drum stool, Thomas certainly doesn't believe in easing gently into his set – amps up to ten and energy level off the scale. He does mellow a little for Done To Me, and shows a unique take on the blues with

his different, distinctive versions of the Elmore James, BB King/ Roy Hawkins, and Richard M. Jones standards respectively, The Sky Is Crying (the album's longest track running to seven and a half minutes), The Thrill Is Gone and Trouble In Mind, all good examples of why he was a finalist in three separate categories in this year's UK Blues Federation Awards. The original Hey Victoria marks a change of pace, after a detailed introduction by Thomas which enhances the appreciation of this folky number. He does the same with Son House's John The Revelator; other borrowed blues tracks that he tackles are BB King's, It Upsets Me Baby (sic – BB called it You Upset Me Baby), Blind Willie McTell via Taj Mahal's Statesboro Blues and for the encore, a mostly raucous version of Elmore's Shake Your Moneymaker. Victim Of Circumstance, originally released in 2023, opens the second half of the show and features some particularly wild playing by Thomas, whilst Can't Have Heartbreak tends towards rockabilly-flavoured Americana. It's as much a part of Thomas' armoury as the slinky, jazzy blues of Do What's Right For Me, and the traditional-sounding slide-driven Mississippi blues of Good Ol' Doney. It's a very impressive release all round.

NORMAN DARWEN

THOMAS HEPPELL

SELF TITLED

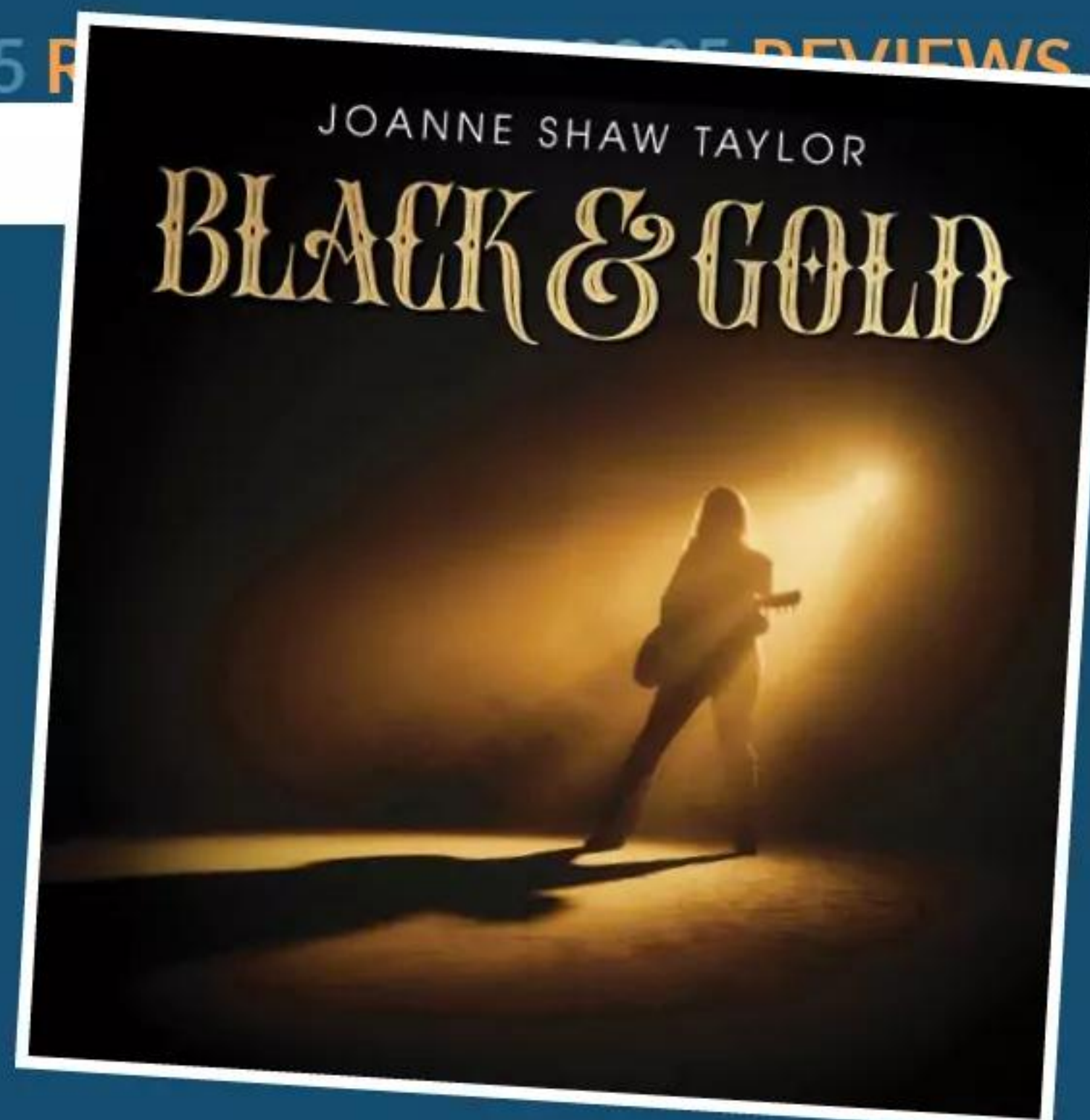
Independent

Berkshire based guitarist/vocalist Thomas Heppell released his self-titled debut album some eighteen months ago now. With the assistance of bandmates Jack Bryant on drums and Howard Head on bass Heppell delivers an album that reveals his versatility. The eleven tracks on offer spanning the length and breadth of the musical spectrum. The thundering opening riff of opener It Is What It Is immediately grabs your attention as Heppell unleashes an exemplary display of slide guitar. The pace slackens slightly as the chugging groove of Good Ol' Doney 'gives me a reason to stay' before Hey Victoria displays a subtler side to Heppell's musical talents showcasing his vocal talents and beauty of his storytelling alongside deftness on the acoustic guitar. Heppell serves up yet another flavour to satisfy our musical

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR

BLACK & GOLD

Journeyman Records



Almost a year to the day from the release of her last studio album, *Heavy Soul*, blues supremo Joanne Shaw Taylor returns with a new offering. Not only does the artist's latest release lament the creative and productive phase which she is presently going through, but it also marks the milestone tenth studio album of her career. Once again, Joanne has joined forces with producer-extraordinaire Kevin Shirley for *Black & Gold*, and as one would expect, the end result is another exceptional release from the dynamic duo.

“the kind of songs that were built to be performed live

Joanne Shaw Taylor has never been afraid to push the boundaries of the blues/rock genre, and her new album is once again a testament to that sentiment. The opening track, *Hold of My Heart*, is a foot-tapping slice of Americana-tinged blues, which perfectly sets the tone for the release. Having undertaken a monthly approach to releasing singles in the build-up to the album, there won't be too many surprises for the artist's dedicated fan base. The opening riff to *All The Things I Said*, leads into a textbook Joanne Shaw Taylor number. It's the kind of track that her fans have come to know and love over the years. With its heartfelt lyrics, catchy hooks and gorgeous solo, the song is one of the many standout tracks of the album. The heartfelt sounds of *Who's Gonna Love Me Now* switch things up with its retro pop stylings. Whilst the barnstorming *I Gotta Stop Letting You Let Me Down* is certainly one of the rockier tracks on the album, the listeners will be drawn in by the song's heavy groove. The same can be said for *Hell of a Good Time*. These are the kind of songs that were built to be performed live and will be welcome additions to JST's stellar setlist.

ADAM KENNEDY



LISTEN, WATCH AND DISCOVER
MORE AT THESE ARTIST LINKS



The brand new studio album from Joanne Shaw Taylor. A bold fusion of blues, soul and modern storytelling.

Hot Tomato

This release comes hot on the heels of last years blues album Sams Place but is really the first album to showcase the writing and vocal skills of guitarist Scott Sharrard who took the place of the sadly departed Paul Barrere. Scott brings a new vibrancy to the band that producer Vance Powell has captured, making this a high-quality Americana style album. First track 4 Days of Heaven, 3 Days of Work launches straight into a high energy, horn filled bomb burst with driving rhythm and great guitar riffs. Bayou Mama takes us into a NOLA Mardi Gras party vibe with beautiful interplay between guitar and keys. Shipwrecks keeps the energy high and features a super solo by band leader Bill Payne on keyboard. Midnight Flight starts off with a bass intro before the



band with horns climb on board, keeping the energy high on this love song. The funky, humorous Too High To Cut My Hair is next, going into almost jamming territory by the mid-point, great guitar and sax solos included. When Hearts Fall is more laid back and introspective. The piano led Strike Up The Band follows featuring as guests the ladies from Larkin Poe on bv's. A retrospective look back at the bands beginnings and journey delivered in heart felt fashion. Bluegrass Pines features Molly Tuttle, Larry Campbell and Teresa Williams as guests. It's got a heavy Latin feel reminding me a lot of Los Lobos. Disappearing Ink has a beautiful rolling intro with Scott adding top class guitar as the song opens up. Love And Life (Never Fear) is fairly laid back, easy going but with a lovely groove augmented by great piano. Dance A Little lives up to its title, a bit Latin, a lot New Orleans, lovely brass and slightly wistful. Running Out Of Time With The Blues is real back porch country blues twangy style with Pinetop-like piano. The album closes with New Orleans Cries Out When She Sings is utterly beautiful, heartfelt vocals and piano opening building slowly to the full band swooping in full on party mode. A fantastic homage to this centre of musical excellence. Little Feat invented Americana way before the term was ever coined and they are back at the top table with this all-round masterclass of a release.



STEVE YOURGLIVCH

**LISTEN, WATCH AND DISCOVER
MORE AT THESE ARTIST LINKS**



appetite as the rock-fuelled incendiary device that is Underdog bolts out of the stable doors. 'People say I got it all' sings Heppell. I'm not about to disagree. Superb bass work from Howard Head forms the backbone of the bar-room swinger She's Fine As Wine whilst the country of Can't Have Heartbreak aided by some fine Jack Bryant sticks work gets the feet shuffling and the toes tapping. The stop-start blues of Bitter Sweet features all three band members on vocals before Victim of Circumstance turns the amps up to eleven for a touch of outstanding blues rock featuring extended Heppell guitar histrionics. Heppell is at his exuberant best throughout To Be This Kind Of Man as a barrage of slide guitar assaults the senses before Heppell brings us down to earth with the hypnotic orchestration of Done To Me. Our journey across the musical landscape concludes with the acoustic Don't Get My Blues. An album with something to suit all tastes. A smorgasbord of musical styles, each song a well crafted and scripted story which leaves a lasting impression and demands repeat plays. Since this album was released, Thomas Heppell has gone on to support Dom Martin on his UK acoustic tour and accompany Chloe Josephine on her solo gigs across the country.

TAF ROCK

VINCE SANTORO

EXPOSED

Independent

In early 2024, drummer, songwriter, and vocalist Santoro sent a rough demo to longtime collaborator George Marinelli and got a surprise in return. Marinelli offered to produce an entire album. That creative spark lit the fuse for his new nine track release here, a deeply personal and sonically rich collection. With his wife Barbara contributing backing vocals and piano, the album became a true family affair. The Rolling Stones-tinged opener, Exposed sets the tone with swagger and vulnerability, Vince's vocals are pleading and honest. From there, Santoro takes listeners into his teenage days with the ska-laced romp Rec Room, a nod to wood-panelled chaos, young love, and tolerant parents, a feelgood beat makes this tune. For Adeline, is a touching tribute

to Santoro's late mother, a quiet meditation on grief wrapped in gentle phrasing another honest song. That emotional weight is offset by the rainy-day reverie of, *Long Slow Rain* and the biting wit of *Everything*, where Santoro skewers double-speak with lyrical precision. Other standouts include the groove laden, *I'd Be Dancing*, and the self-deprecating, *A Too Familiar Sight*. What's That Like, is full of social comment and that human connection, stark reality played out to a slow guitar riff, a bittersweet song. The release closes with the soulful *Shade Tree*, where Santoro sings of finding peace and permanence, a melodic and catchy chorus, a song of reflection. With Marinelli layering guitars, mandolin, and keys throughout, this release is Santoro's most revealing and resonant work to date, highly recommended.

COLIN CAMPBELL

DIK BANOVICH
BLUE DAYS

Independent

Dik Banovich is an acoustic picker whose material often ranges through Americana and old-school blues. A Scot by birth, raised mostly in Chicago, he returned to work in various areas of the UK before heading to France where he is now based in Brittany. This latest offering, *Blue Days*, is an EP with five tracks, a mix of traditional blues partnered with a couple of self-penned efforts. Tracks include 'Tell Old Bill,' always a crowd pleaser and 'You Gotta Move' a well lauded Afro-gospel number. Others include the title track a surprising new-Rap style of music that, as expected, will be either liked or not. It certainly challenges the norms of most acoustic blues these days, as does another track which has a decidedly blues feel with modern, political themes, the closing track, 'Travellin' On.' On a personal note, I'm a fan of this guy and his music which always straddles the blues and roots genres with that modern countryesque style, often a tricky achievement. If you are a fan of solid acoustic picking and roots music, you should consider grabbing a copy of this one. It will probably both surprise and engage you.

IAIN PATIENCE

TRUTH IS
The powerful new album
from Texas blues guitar-
ist and vocalist Carolyn
Wonderland. Raw, re-
flective, and rooted in
truth – a must-hear for
blues fans in 2025.



ALLIGATOR RECORDS



**“this record should be played
loud and often**

song, Blues For Gene, dedicated to the late Gene Taylor, that really ties up all the elements of Carolyn Wonderland's many skills in one song. It's showcases her guitar playing, her total grasp of blues vocal technique, and it lets her wonderful studio band unwind and show their considerable chops in full. It's a tribute, a sadness, and an optimism all in one song, and it reminds everyone that Carolyn Wonderland is a force of blues nature, and this record should be played loud and often.

ANDY HUGHES



Collated from the playlists of the Independent Blues Broadcasters Association members

Position	Artist	Album
1	CATFISH	TIME TO FLY
2	DORIS BRENDDEL & LEE DUNHAM	BIG BLUE SKY
3	CECILYA & THE CANDY KINGS	PARISIAN MAMBO
4	WILL WILDE	BLUES IS STILL ALIVE
5	MICKE BJORKLOF & BLUE STRIP	OUTTAKES
6	ERJA LYYTINEN	SMELL THE ROSES
7	JIMMY REGAL & THE ROYALS	WELL BOSS
8	ELLES BAILEY	BENEATH THE NEON GLOW
9	MATT SCHOFIELD TRIO	MANY MOONS VOL. 1
10	LITTLE FEAT	STRIKE UP THE BAND
11	EMMA WILSON	A SPOONFUL OF WILLIE DIXON
12	SOUTHERN AVENUE	FAMILY
13	CAROLYN WONDERLAND	TRUTH IS
14	BIG DAVE & THE DUTCHMEN	BIG DAVE & THE DUTCHMEN
15	ANDREW DUNCANSON	CALIFORNIA TRAP
16	ALLY VENABLE	MONEY & POWER
17	BEN TYZACK	BLUES TO THE RIVER
18	JENNIFER LYN & THE GROOVE REVIVAL	RETROGRADE
19	ANDY FAIRWEATHER LOW	THE INVISIBLE BLUESMAN
20	BLIND LEMON PLEDGE	LEMON LIVE!
21	ALICE ARMSTRONG	LIVE AT AREA 88
22	RA'SHAD THE BLUES KID	LIVE IN CLARKSDALE
23	MONIKA NORDLI	HARD WORKING WOMAN
24	FABRIZIO POGGI	HEALING BLUES
25	POPA CHUBBY	I LOVE FREDDIE KING
26	DAVIS COEN	LIVE AT PROUD LARRY'S
27	ROBBERT DUIJF	SILVER SPOON
28	THE CINELLI BROTHERS	ALMOST EXACTLY...
29	JOHNNY IGUANA	AT DELMARK
30	JANIVA MAGNESS	BACK FOR ME
31	LUCY ZIRINS	CHASING CLOCKS
32	MICKE & LEFTY FEAT. CHEF	LIVE ON AIR
33	THE WEEKEND BLUES BAND	MISUNDERSTOOD
34	SAMANTHA FISH	PAPER DOLL
35	JON CLEARY & THE ABSOLUTE MONSTER GENTLEMEN	THE BYWATER SESSIONS
36	DUDLEY TAFT	THE SPEED OF LIFE
37	BOBBY RUSH & KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD	YOUNG FASHIONED WAYS
38	GALACTIC & IRMA THOMAS	AUDIENCE WITH THE QUEEN
39	REVENANT	BEST MEDICINE - EP
40	TROUBLE COUNTY	BLACKEN THE SKY

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